

12. 9. 1764

S E R M O N S

O N

Several S U B J E C T S.



By the late

WILLIAM BRAKENRIDGE, D.D. *K*

Rector of St. *Michael-Bassishaw*, Librarian of SION
COLLEGE, and Fellow of the ROYAL and ANTI-
QUARIAN SOCIETIES.

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L O N D O N :

Printed in the Y E A R 1764.

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S E R M O N S

ON

Several SUBJECTS.



BY THE

WILLIAM BRAKENRIDGE, D.D.

Regent of St. Michael-Baileys, Librarian of Stow
College, and Fellow of the Royal and Anti-
Quarian Societies

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S E R M O N I.

On Miracles.

JOHN III. 2.

*No man can do these miracles that thou doest,
except God be with him.*

MIRACLES, being proposed in S E R M. I.
the gospel, as evidences of the
truth of our holy religion, it is
well worth our trouble to make a strict
enquiry into their nature and circum-
stances, that we may be able to give *a*
reason of the hope that is in us. To be
inquisitive about what has the appearance
of a Revelation from God, is a pious Dis-
position. Thus the ruler of the Jews,
Nicodemus, whose words I have read,
being a good man, was desirous to know
the Will of God; and having seriously
attended to the wonderful works of our
Saviour, and examined them, according
to what he knew of that Will, he found
B just

SERM. just grounds to be convinced that they
 I. were wrought by an extraordinary, or
 divine power, and therefore, that God
 must be with him, and approve of his
 doctrine: *No man, said he, can do these
 miracles that thou doest, except God be with
 him.*

He had the advantage of living at the
 time, and in the Country, where these
 things were done; and had opportunity
 himself often to observe, and consider
 them. And as he saw that they exceeded
 all human ability, and were contrary to
 the common course of things, though
 perfectly consistent with the moral per-
 fections and nature of God, he justly
 concluded that God must be assisting to
 them, or at least some powerful agent
 commissioned by him.

In discoursing on this subject, I shall

I. Consider the nature of Miracles in
 general. Then

II. Shew that though they may be
 contrary to all our *Experience* in
 common things, they may yet be
 proved by some extraordinary de-
 gree of *Testimony*. And

III.

III. That the proof of those in the S E R M.
gospel is sufficient to satisfy an atten- I.
tive and candid Mind. I am

I. Then to consider the nature of Miracles in general. Now it is evident, that all matter being utterly inactive, can produce no effect, but by the means of some self-moving Power. Hence it is, that all we see come to pass in the ordinary course of things, in the material world, bespeaks only the operation of divine Providence, conducting to the proper end the things which it hath created, and put into action; and what is called Nature, or the course of Nature, if we suppose the existence of God, is nothing more than the ordinary and established influence of that Providence, exerting itself in the Universe; and this course of things, this constant method of acting upon each other which we observe in natural causes and effects, is never altered, but on some very extraordinary occasion; nor can it frequently be done without destroying the order of things, and dissolving the present System. And a Miracle of course may be defined to be any Event, that is contrary, or not agreeable to the ordi-

SERMON. nary and established Course of things in
 I. the material World.

It is usual to distinguish miracles into those which are only wonderful to us, who cannot see the immediate power that works them, and those which are really instances of divine power in themselves, such as animating a dead body, and the like. But this distinction is of no consequence, because in both cases the miracles are of equal importance to religion, as they are supposed to be contrary to the visible, established course of things, and above all human ability.

Miracles then being events contrary to the ordinary operations of providence, it is plain, that so far as they are the effects of power, they are possible, and may be done by God. For if we allow that he acts freely, that he formed the present system of the universe, and established its laws, connecting the parts of matter in a beautiful harmony; he can doubtless, so far as power is concerned, make another system in a directly opposite method. And as at the beginning he might so have constituted things, that what is now wonderful, would have been the *ordinary Course*, he may now also change, or suspend

pend the present order, in particular instances, for some great and important Reasons. SERM.
I.

Nor can miracles, thus defined, be inconsistent with the wisdom and goodness of God, according to any notion we have of his moral perfections. For if we suppose men free Agents, as it is certain they are, it may be very consistent with the wisdom and goodness of God, on some extraordinary occasions, to influence their minds or awaken their attention by miracles, in order to bring about some proper and necessary effect among them, to prevent their departing from the original intent of their Creation, or to bring them back, if they are already departed; which otherwise, perhaps, could not be done, without destroying the freedom of their actions. And it is a condescension highly worthy the divine goodness, to prevent by extraordinary means, those who through the abuse of their powers might run into misery. And for God to act in this manner, to adapt his government to the nature of the beings over whom he rules; to alter, or vary his schemes, according to the circumstances of free creatures; this is to act in the most perfect and

S E R M. amiable manner, according to the reason
 I. of things. So that miracles, it is plain,
 are consistent not only with the power of
 God, but with all our notions of him,
 as the moral Governor of the world.

If it be said, that the present constitution of things is eternal, and necessarily flowing from the divine nature, and therefore that miracles, as contrary thereto, must be impossible: the answer is obvious; if things are necessary from a necessity influencing God, he can have no choice or will in producing them, and the whole system must be a necessary emanation from him, and therefore absolutely part of himself. For whatever cause necessarily produces matter and its forms, must itself be matter, and consequently the Deity must be the universe itself, and those attributes of Will, Choice, Wisdom, and Goodness, are but mere empty sounds; a supposition, which will terminate in downright Atheism. Let us now

II. Endeavour to shew, that though Miracles be contrary to all our common Experience, they may yet be made credible by some extraordinary degree of Testimony.

mony. That they are contrary to our S E R M.
experience, and that of all men, except- I.
ing a very few, must certainly be allowed.

Hence when men see the operations of providence steady, and uninterrupted, and the effects constantly, and as it were necessarily flowing from the causes, they are apt to think, that things could not have been otherwise, and they are at a loss to conceive how there can be any variation from what they have seen. Nevertheless, this invariable and uniform appearance does not prove that things were always so, or that they will continue so: it is only our being accustomed to the course of things, as they are, that makes us imagine a necessity in the operations of nature. For the whole of nature, in each particular, depends every moment upon the will of God, and may be altered according to his pleasure. And at the beginning, when the world was made, all the various laws and properties of nature were each of them, in fact, the same as so many miracles. But however, though our experience shews this uninterrupted course, it does not follow from thence, that no facts, or events, contrary to this, were ever observed by any number of

SERM. people in any age or place; for though
I. we, and the bulk of mankind, know nothing of them from our own senses, this can never be considered as any experience against them, any more than our never having seen a particular appearance in nature, can be called an experiment, that it never did exist; so that to infer from this, because we have never seen or known any facts contrary to the usual course, that there can be no such thing, is to reason weakly, and from a narrow imagination. For as we do not know all the methods that God may have prescribed to himself in his government of reasonable beings, so we cannot tell how far miracles may be useful and proper. If God does not act by necessity in the methods of his providence, but as a free and benevolent being, they seem to be possible, and may have been experienced by others. For it cannot reasonably be imagined, that nature must go always on with such a steady and determined direction, that in no case the misery, or happiness of rational creatures is to be regarded; this were to give us an uncomfortable notion of the Deity; nor can men in some circumstances, be of so small

small importance, that a little change of S E R M.
the ordinary course of things, for an in- I.
considerable space of time, to promote
their happiness, should not be effected.
For instance, if the raising of a dead bo-
dy to life, and the curing of a disease by
a word, and the like, could be of the ut-
most consequence to ascertain a system of
moral truths, to secure our eternal wel-
fare, why may not such a deviation from
the usual methods of nature be allowed
on such an extraordinary occasion? This
seems more agreeable to the goodness of
God, than that the methods of his pro-
vidence in the material world should be
positively unalterable. What should we
say of the benevolence of a Prince, who
would not go a little out of the ordinary
way of his government, to save thousands
of his subjects from miseries? Would not
such an inflexible and horrid scheme of
governing be rather terrible, than amia-
ble? And therefore, as there have been
men who affirmed, that they had experi-
ence of those extraordinary facts, their
testimony can only be disproved, by shew-
ing the absurdity of the facts, or the
weakness of their evidence.

It

SERM.

I.

It seems moreover to be plain, that every fact, however extraordinary, that supposes no absurdity or contradiction, may be proved by testimony. For this is the foundation of all history, both of nature, and mankind, and upon it depends far the greatest part of our knowledge.

In the material and animal world, there are many things that we could never have conjectured, if the repeated experience of certain persons did not abundantly prove them; and we are obliged and glad to depend upon their evidence, for most surprising things, that do not come within our own knowledge, or of those we converse with. Some natural events seem to be as miracles to the inhabitants of distant regions of the earth, and could never have been believed, if they had not been well attested. Our experience of nature is so very confined, that in many cases, the natural events would seem to us, as impossible, as the effects of cold in congealing water into ice did to the Indian, who rejected the evidence of an European traveller with scorn, because it was, seemingly, inconsistent with his own experience. But he reasoned wrong,
for

for his observations were too narrow and scanty to have made such a positive conclusion; he ought to have suspended his judgment, till he was better satisfied of the veracity of the relator.

SERM.
I.

From which this seems to be evident, that as we are so incompetent judges of what may be done in the natural world, we must be much more so in what relates to the government of God, over his reasonable and free creatures. And as in the one case, we allow, and are convinced by common testimony, so we may in the other, be satisfied with some higher degrees of it; for every possible event may be proved by it. Extraordinary facts may justly require some strong and unusual attestation, but surely some degree or other of it, will satisfy any honest and reasonable mind.

It is true, it may be said, that as Miracles are events contrary to our experience, there arises from thence a strong presumption against them; because we usually reason about the probability of facts from experience. And indeed, this is often sufficient to determine our judgment. But surely it will never follow from this, that no proof can be sufficient
to

SERM. to take off this presumption. For there
 I. may be evidence given from testimony
 with such circumstances, that it may be
 absurd to reject it. The number of ob-
 servers may be so increased, and the cir-
 cumstances so heightened, as to make us
 as certain of a fact contrary to our com-
 mon experience, as if we saw it with our
 eyes.

Suppose a number of persons, of a mo-
 ral and serious character, were to attest a
 miracle worthy of God, and calculated for
 the happiness of mankind, and were will-
 ing to suffer death to maintain their testi-
 mony, it seems more reasonable to believe
 them than to trust to our own experience,
 that can shew no real absurdity, or pal-
 pable contradiction, in such a wonderful
 event. It appears easier in this case to
 give credit to them, than to imagine that
 men could offer such violence to all the
 feelings of human nature, merely to im-
 pose upon us, especially in a great num-
 ber of persons combined together. And
 it may be said farther, that if such a
 wonderful event, contrary to all our ob-
 servation, is brought to confirm a doc-
 trine which is the foundation of all our
 hopes hereafter, and delivers us from
 eternal

eternal doubt and anxiety, this seems so S E R M.
worthy of the goodness of God, that a I.
reasonable man cannot but be satisfied
with so strong and affecting a proof. He
will think such an interposition of provi-
dence worthy of the moral Governor of
the world, though it go beyond all his
own private conceptions. Indeed if mi-
racles were offered to our belief, tending
to no moral purpose, neither to the hap-
piness of mankind, nor confirming any
doctrine or opinions that were useful, in
this case, perhaps, it might justly be
affirmed, that they were impossible, and
no evidence from testimony could prove
the truth of them; because it can never
be imagined, that God will alter the
course of things, established by him,
without some great and important rea-
son, such as the happiness of his rational
creatures. And here, for the most part,
Unbelievers mistake the argument; they
suppose miracles unconnected, with any
moral purpose, and then they say they
cannot be attested; which may be true;
but the case of the gospel miracles is quite
otherwise, they are all connected with the
grand design of confirming a doctrine of
the greatest importance to the comfort
and

S E R M. and happiness of mankind. And it can
I. never be imagined, if God is a benevolent
and merciful being, that he would not,
on such an occasion, alter a little the usual
methods of his providence.

It appears then, that miracles in some
cases, when they are of great importance
to the happiness of mankind, may be cre-
dible, if they are supported with an ex-
traordinary degree of testimony. Let us
now

III. Shew that the evidence for those
in the gospel history, to which I shall here
confine myself, is sufficient to satisfy an
honest and candid Mind.

We have eight writers of the New
Testament, who were all of them eye-
witnesses of some or other of those won-
derful works, done either by our Saviour
or his apostles ; and they have moreover,
recorded an infinite number of other men,
who were Spectators of them. These seem
to be all plain, honest, and artless men,
relating their story without any disguise
or affectation. Most of them were in low
stations, unacquainted with the policy of
the world, nor had they any of the stu-
died delicacies of stile, or address, by
which

which they might deceive the unwary. S E R M.

But in their writings, they shew great I.
goodness of heart, they appear lovers of mankind, desirous to promote the happiness of men, here and hereafter. They appear also to have been zealous worshippers of God, and to have had a due regard themselves for his honour and glory, while they endeavoured to excite men to love and fear him.

Men of this character seem to be the properest persons to attest any facts that are of importance to the world. They had principles of religion and virtue to awe their minds, and to keep them from fraud and imposture. Let any one read their writings, and he will see in them all the symptoms of integrity, all the emotions of men eager to reform their fellows, and inspire them with the sublimest notions of moral goodness.

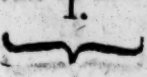
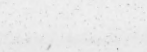
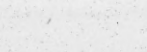
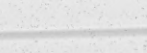
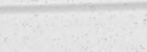
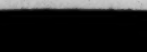
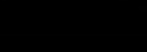
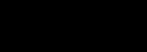
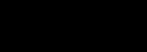
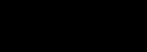
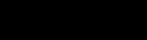
But, besides this amiable disposition, they had no temptation to impose on the world, which is a strong presumption of their Veracity. They could propose no advantage to themselves by teaching a doctrine directly opposite to the passions and vices of men; they could expect only contempt, insults, and violence. Nor
could

SERM. I. could the love of fame ever excite them to such a desperate attempt, which set the prospect of nothing but misery and death before them. Therefore as they had no motives, it is absurd to suppose they would act contrary to all the Dictates and Interests of humanity, and solicit their own destruction. However, if we could conceive, that a number of such men should combine together to impose on the world, from some wild or ridiculous notions, and that all their zeal for virtue was but mere pretence; was it probable that they would all continue firm together, and not one of them divulge the cheat, whatever lucrative reasons they might have to induce them? was it probable, that they should all chuse the utmost distress and misery, rather than retract their testimony? This is utterly unaccountable, unless they were fully persuaded of the truth of what they attested. But it is still more so, when it is considered, that they willingly suffered the most cruel torments, and death itself, rather than desist from publishing those miraculous facts. Could a number of men, value life and all that was dear to them so little, that they should forfeit their existence
and

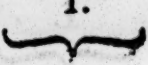
and happiness, only to support the credit of a story, which, they were conscious, was a falshood? SERM.
I.

This evidence is the strongest that can possibly be given for any thing, that men should die to confirm the truth of it. It is such probability, as cannot be rejected without an absurdity. It is against all our experience of men, that they should deliberately forego all their enjoyments in this world, for what they know to be a lie, and at last seal their testimony with their blood. Could we imagine all this to be mere trick and imposition, it would be as great a miracle as any in the gospel.

It is true, men who suffer death for their crimes, do often assert falsities to the last moment. And there are men, who can suffer death to support speculative opinions, and notions which they are persuaded of, though they may be false. But that men, should submit to death willingly, to support facts they know to be false, when they can easily secure themselves from it, by withdrawing their attestation; this is what no age, or country can give an instance of, except in this case of the Christian religion. And hence, by the way, appears a mani-

S E R M. ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.}  ^{I.} 

To all this, it may be said by some, that the apostles, and other witnesses to the miracles, were Enthusiasts, who believed their own visionary imaginations, and acted in consequence of them, as if they had been true. To which it may be answered, that they were so far from enthusiasm, that they proceeded with the greatest deliberation and caution, examining the facts, and not trusting to the reports of others, until they saw the things, and were convinced by their own senses. They were rather backward in believing, and one of them especially, shewed as much hesitation and stubbornness, as a modern Unbeliever could have done. There was nothing in their conduct that favoured of a disturbed mind; or if we could suppose that they were disordered,

disordered, they could never be so far S E R M.
gone, that they could not observe what I.
was done in their sight, and before them. 
They could not be deceived in what their
senses plainly shewed them, any more
than others, in the common occurrences
of life; for enthusiasm does not take
away mens plain sensations. And if we
could think any one of them to be
tainted, it is impossible to conceive this
of all, when there appears so much sen-
sible regularity in their determinations
and endeavours, to promote the ends of
their ministry.

But farther, the success of the gospel,
in the first ages of christianity, is a strong
confirmation of the truth of those won-
derful works. For can it possibly be
imagined, that all those multitudes, that
embraced the gospel, in the days of the
apostles, had never seen one miracle per-
formed. Could they be drawn to a be-
lief of it only by idle tales? Were the fa-
culties of mankind weaker then, than at
present, that they could not reason con-
cerning the evidence given for such things?
As this seems to be absurd, it is equally
so, to think that men could be more ea-
sily imposed on at that time, than now;

S E R M. especially when they were to expect no-
 I. thing, but persecution and misery in this
 world, as the reward of their belief. And
 therefore, the many thousands of converts
 among all nations, in the apostolick times,
 will ever be a presumption of the sure
 evidence which they had, that those
 mighty signs and wonders were certainly
 wrought.

To conclude, the probability of the
 miracles in the gospel history, may be
 shewn from some plain predictions of fu-
 ture events, both in the Old and New
 Testament, that have been fulfilled, and
 which could never have been foreseen by
 any human sagacity. Because they shew,
 that the books in which they are con-
 tained, must have been written by some
 persons assisted by the Spirit of God; con-
 sequently there is a probability, that the
 same persons might work miracles. For
 as Prophecies, when fulfilled, are really
 miraculous things, those who delivered
 them must be considered, as having know-
 ledge and discernment above the sons of
 men. And if they were capable of such
 wonderful things, as to foretell very dis-
 tant future events, it is also probable,
 that they might be assisted by an extraor-
 dinary

dinary power to perform supernatural works. Not that the one power necessarily infers the other, but there is a probability, that the person who has divine assistance in one case, may have it in another. The prophecies then, if they can be made out to have been accomplished, which I think has been solidly done, corroborate the evidence of miracles; so that there is an argument of their certainty in the scriptures, independent of testimony: And upon these two, the probability of facts in the gospel history, together with the prophecies, the truth of the Christian religion is fairly and reasonably established to all generations.

S E R M.
I.
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primary power to perform supernatural works. Not that the one power necessarily works the other, but there is a probability, that the person who has divine assistance in one way may have it in another. The prophetess then, if they can be made out to have been genuine, which I think has been proved, is not without the evidence of miracle. It is not that there is an argument from authority in the foregoing, but the fact of testimony: And upon the fact of testimony of facts in the world, it is argued with the probability, that the person who has performed the miracle, is not without the evidence of miracle.

✓

S E R M O N II.

On the Shortness of Human Life.

P S A L. XXXIX. 5.

Behold, thou hast made my days as an hand-breadth, and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.

AMIDST all the chearfulness, which S E R M.
II.
our present enjoyments are found sometimes, and are expected always to inspire, there is a reflection, which to a considerate man will occur often, and will have its weight as often as it occurs; namely, that life, to say the best of it, is short, and that the joys and purposes of it are terminated by a boundary at a very little distance indeed. The disposition of things in this manner by providence, the Psalmist expresses in the words of the text, *Thou hast made my days as an hand-breadth, and mine age is as nothing before thee; verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.*

SERM.

II.

That life is short, has been the general complaint of men in all ages. The longest period of it is but a very few years. *The days of our years, says David, and general observation confirm it, are but threescore years and ten, and if by reason of uncommon strength they be fourscore years, yet is our strength labour and sorrow, while it lasts; and it is soon cut off and we flie away.* A short time indeed to make such a noise in the world, as men commonly do. When we come to the utmost extremity of it, how like a dream does it appear. We have not time to look about us, and to consider the nature and properties of things that surround us. They appear and disappear in an instant, and we pass on from one scene to another, till the drama is finished. As the author of the book of Wisdom expresseth it, *our life passeth away like a shadow, and as a post that hasteth by. And as a ship that passeth over the waves of the water, which when it is gone by the trace thereof cannot be found, so we in like manner as soon as we were born began to draw to our end.*

How short and transitory does life appear, when we consider the many successions of men that have been before us,
and

and even the multitudes whom ourselves S E R M.
have seen and known, who have finish- II.
ed their course, and are no more.

Even in our time the earth has been, as it were, emptied and replenished with new inhabitants, till the very few, whom providence has indulged with an added year or two, may conceive themselves in a new world, and in the midst of another generation.

But farther, the utmost period of life is not only short in its nature, but it is also often abridged by numberless accidents, which it is impossible to foresee. The bulk of men do not live to the half of that period. A very great part are taken off in their infancy ; many in the vigour and gaiety of their youth, and some in advanced life, while, perhaps, they are busied in pursuing the schemes of ambition and interest. Some that have begun life happily, and made a good appearance, drop at once, like flowers, which, before they arrive at their perfection, wither and decay. Why God should thus abbreviate the short life of so many of his creatures, and especially of the most innocent of them, I mean children, is not easily to be accounted for ; there are undoubtedly

SERM. doubtedly good reasons for it, which our
 II. ignorance cannot comprehend. *For his
 ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts
 as our thoughts.*

Again, we may observe, that though this space of time allowed to man be so very short, yet it is long enough for the great business which he has to do. The great end of our being is to acquire the knowledge of God and our duty, and to get the habits of virtue and goodness established in us. Now our life is sufficiently long for these important purposes. For by diligence and industry, we may know as much of God and our duty, from nature and revelation in a few years, as human nature is capable of; and the habits of virtue may at the same time be acquired so far, that we cannot be more perfect in this state of things. And as for other advantages, though they may be great and useful ornaments to us in life, yet are they of little consequence to our everlasting happiness. It is only religion and virtue that can be essentially useful, by promoting our interest hereafter. If the knowledge and practice of these therefore, can be had in a few years, the great business of life is done, and we
 are

are fit and ready to be translated to another state of existence. But instead of improving time to this purpose, how is it generally mispent and abused! Some pass it in vain and trifling pursuits, others in voluptuousness, some in the purposes of ambition, others in amassing riches, which are of so little avail toward their happiness, and others, which is worst of all, in debauchery, or in disturbing the happiness of their brethren. So that generally, a very little of this short life is spent in the proper purposes of it; and it seems indeed, rather too long, than too short, for the bulk of mankind, when we consider how it is applied.

We see the ante-diluvian Patriarchs who lived to a very great age in comparison of ours, how wretchedly they employed it; how they abandoned themselves to wickedness, and, as it were, constrained God to destroy them, and for ever after to shorten the period of human life, as we read in the scriptures. The great ages of men in the beginning of the world, may seem perhaps, improbable to some men now; but I think besides the authority of the scriptures, there may be reasons given that will support it, and make it

SERM.
II.

SERM.

II.

it appear probable to a serious enquirer. I shall only mention by the way, that it is no unnatural supposition, that God might at first make the life of man to be as long as the life of any other animal whatever. For one would think, that the more perfect a creature is in its faculties and form, the longer the duration of its existence ought to be, because it may be presumed to be of more importance; and if we did not see the contrary, it might be imagined that man, the most excellent of all the creatures of God, ought at least to live as long as any of them. Now as we know that several animals live to five or six times the present age of man, that is, to four or five hundred years; why then may we not think, that God might make the first of mankind to live as long, or longer, than any of these brutes do now? and that the period of life was altered on account of the abuse of it. But this and other things, which might be said concerning the length of the first ages of mankind, needs not now to be enlarged upon.

Again, we may observe, that the shortness of our life is a strong presumption of another state of things. For the faculties of the soul are too great and extensive for
so

so short a duration as the present ; a less S E R M.
degree of reason and intelligence, if II.
we were to have no farther existence,
would have suited better such a minute
and transitory being. We should have
been more quiet, and less solicitous,
without strong sentiments of immortality
and happiness. For our more intense
powers of the soul, only conduce to make
us more unhappy, when we suppose them
to be of so short continuance. They
make us anxious and unsatisfied, and
give us a notion and desire of greater fe-
licity. So that if there was no future state,
such powers of the soul, as we possess,
seem to be given us to no purpose ; or if
to *any* purpose, only to disquiet and per-
plex us, which is by no means analogous
to the conduct of providence in other
things. For with regard to our senses,
we find, care has been taken that they have
not more acuteness, than was necessary to
our well-being. For instance, if the
sight, hearing, feeling, and smelling, were
much more quick, we could not be so
easy ; we should be disturbed by a greater
variety of objects disagreeably affecting
us. And therefore, if the soul has more
intense powers than are suited to our hap-
piness

SERM.

II.

pineness and short abode here, it seems to be a strong presumption, that this state is not our All, and that infinite wisdom which does nothing in vain, has fitted us for a longer duration, for a more perfect life, where our faculties will be more adequate to the extent of our being.

And hence, as there is a life to come, this short space here, may be considered as an introduction, or as a state of probation; we are to approve ourselves, and fit us here for that longer existence, and according as we behave now, so will it fare with us hereafter; for God has promised eternal life to them *that by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour; but to them that do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath.* And indeed, to what end else but for a state of probation, could a period be given us that makes so small a part of the whole of our being? or why should this manner of existing be so different from that other, but for such a great and important purpose?

This transition of man through different states of existence, first to pass through a short life here, and then afterwards to go into another, is wonderful

to

to think of ; but we may observe some-
thing analogous to it in the natural
world, in some of the lower animals, In-
fects I mean, who at various stages of
their being, undergo great changes in
their form, and nature, and manner of
subsisting; the old fabrick seems to dissolve
and mortify, and out of the ruins there
arises a new creature, and the change
seems to be nearly as great and extraor-
dinary, as that which men undergo in
their passage to the other life, and expect
at the general resurrection.

S E R M.

II.

I come now according to my

II. Proposal, to make some practical
reflections on the shortness of human
life. And

I. From hence we may learn to make
a just estimate of the things in this world.
For if life is so short, and we are so little
time to have the possession of all its en-
joyments, we ought always to act, and
use things in such manner, as to shew
ourselves sensible, that we must quickly
leave them. We ought to consider, of
what importance they are to our happi-
ness, upon the whole of our being, whe-
ther they are only connected with our

SERM. present transitory state; or if they are
 II. likely to affect us also in a future existence? For if they relate only to this life, their value must be little, in comparison of those things which will, probably, endure with us for ever. The things of this world, as they strike strongly on the senses, are overvalued; they engross our affections, and we cleave to them as if we were never to part with them; but when we reflect on the shortness of the term in which we are to possess them, this ought to diminish our esteem, and constrain us to an indifference about them; it ought to correct that anxiety, that perplexing care, and desire we have for them, and to make us, as the apostle well expresses it, *to use this world as if we used it not, to buy as if we were not to possess, and to rejoice as if we rejoiced not.* In common life, we estimate things according as they are durable; those things, that in their own nature, suddenly perish and are gone, we value far less, than those that last with us for years and generations; and for the same reason, all our possessions and enjoyments, as we are soon to pass from them, should be estimated accordingly. We are to re-
 gard

gard them as travellers do the furniture S E R M.
of an inn, as designed to serve our pre- II.

sent convenience; always remembering, that we are not to live here as if this were our only abode, to build; to hoard, and to scheme for ages; but that we ought to confine our projects within a compass suitable to the small extent of our being.

And if we really judge of the value of things in this manner, we shall see of how little importance all the honours, the riches, and pleasures of this world are.

All the glory of man is as the flower of the grass, says the prophet, the grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth away.

A few years will soon put an end to all such acquisitions. The men that are possessed of the objects of ambition make a noise in the world, and despise those that are beneath them; but all their pride and show soon passes away like a dream, or in the words of the prophet Isaiah, xiv. 11. *Their pomp shall be brought down to the grave, and the worm shall be spread under them, and the worm shall cover them.*

The rich too may be haughty and insolent, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches, but they must soon leave their wealth to others, and

D

perhaps,

S E R M.

II.

perhaps, to those who will have little regard to their memory. They heap up riches and know not who shall gather them. And as to the men of pleasure, they may indulge their appetite, and satiate themselves with their sensual enjoyments, but all their mirth and jollity will soon be extinguished, and it will at length *bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder.*

2. From the view of the shortness of our life, we may see of how little real importance, all the evils and afflictions are that good men may possibly meet with. For as the whole of our life may be supposed to bear no proportion to the duration of our being hereafter, the evils and troubles that befall us must be inconsiderable, when they affect so small a part of our existence. For all the vexations and difficulties here, may be considered as less than the uneasiness and torment of a day, when compared to the infinite extent of eternity. And therefore, the expectation of that everlasting state, in a good man, should take away the painful remembrance of all his troubles here. At most, a few years will set him clear of them; and as they are so short and transitory, they may with patience be endured.

red. All pain, sickness, and trouble, will S E R M.
soon be extinguished, and leave no re- II.
mains of their malignity; death will sud-
denly bury them in perpetual oblivion,
death will hush to silence all the mur-
murs and clamours of the distressed; for
there, as it is expressed in the book of
Job, *the wicked cease from troubling, and
the weary are at rest.* If the afflictions we
complain of, are grievous and hard for
our nature to bear, it ought always to
be remembered, that they will not last
long. They are to be considered, only
as difficulties and rubs in a journey,
which we overlook, in the hope of satis-
faction at the end of it. And happy are
we, if they make us thoughtful and so-
licitous about our everlasting welfare, for
in that case, our light afflictions, that are
but for a moment, will, as St. Paul ex-
presses it, *work for us a far more exceeding
and eternal weight of glory.*

3. From the consideration of the
shortness of this life, we may learn to im-
prove and husband our time. For if our
time is short, it is precious, and it is of
the greatest consequence to us to manage
it to advantage. We have full employ-
ment for it, if we duly consider the busi-

S E R M.

II.

ness that is allotted us. We are to lay a foundation for our eternal happiness hereafter; and for this, we must not only acquire the knowledge of God and our duty, but we must also attain to the habits of virtue; which is not to be done all at once, but requires time and application. The old habits of vice must by degrees be conquered; appetite for religion and goodness, must by frequent exercise and trials be encouraged; and we must, by vigorous endeavours, advance in useful knowledge, and in the work of our salvation. Difficulties, by degrees, will be surmounted, if we constantly hold on; and labour itself will, by degrees, become easy and agreeable. No man arrives at any perfection all at once; it is by long use and care, that men become considerable in any art or profession. And for the same reason, in the art of living well, it must be some time before we can be proficient, and fit to be translated to another state of existence. We ought therefore, to be diligent and careful, to accomplish the work of our salvation, as the whole time, at the utmost, is so very short, and yet may still be made shorter by innumerable accidents. We have no
time

time to spend in idle amusements; none S E R M.
to bestow on impertinent and trifling en- II.
quiries; all pleasures, except where they
are necessary to recruit the spirits, and to
give some relaxation to the mind, are to
be looked on as destructive and contrary
to our interest, because they steal from us
many opportunities of advancing our
everlasting happiness: we ought to con-
sider every added day as a new opportu-
nity to do something toward the welfare
of our souls, to secure our grand and
eternal interest. And every day is really
lost, in which we have not been endea-
vouring to do it, by discharging our duty
as good and religious men.

In the last place, if our life here is so
very short, we may see from hence, the
great importance of securing to ourselves
our happiness beyond our present exist-
ence. For all our enjoyments here, how-
ever considerable, since they so quickly
pass from us, are nothing, unless we are
sure of something more durable hereafter.
Life is soon gone, and before we are
aware of it, we are near to its end.
Youth is often spent in folly and imper-
tinnence, middle age in care and anxiety,
and the last of our days, are for the most

SERM.

II.

part attended with miserable infirmities ; so that if we have no hopes of some better being beyond the grave, our whole state here is of so little consequence, that perhaps, it had been as well for us to have had no being at all. Since therefore, there is a life to come after this short and imperfect state, as reason and religion assure us, it must be of the utmost importance to secure our happiness there ; for that is all the comfortable view we can have ; and unless we can extend our thoughts to it, there can be no satisfaction to the soul. This ought to be the great business of this transitory life, for it is as our Saviour justly expresses it, the *one thing needful*. Here we ought to use our diligence and industry, that whatever be our lot in mortality, whether prosperous or adverse, we may not fail of being happy in eternity. And for this we are to run all hazard, whenever there can be any competition between the things in this world, and the hopes of glory and happiness in another. We are to imitate the merchant in the parable, whom our Saviour represented as selling all that he had to purchase the pearl of great price, because by that he had the probability of making

making his whole fortune at once, and being enriched for ever. We ought to follow the example of those worthies St. Paul recounts in his epistle to the Hebrews, who disregarding the pleasures of sin, that are but for a season, and confessing that they were strangers and pilgrims in the earth, sought after a *better country, that is an heavenly*. For as as we have nothing here to fix upon, nothing that will continue with us, it behoves us to endeavour to secure to ourselves something that may remain with us beyond all our present acquisitions. The things of this world we are, indeed, so far to regard, as our natural necessities oblige us; but we are not to spend the whole of our time and care upon them. It is only the happiness of our souls in the invisible world, upon which we ought to exert the strength and vigour of our thoughts. Let us therefore, look toward that in the first place; and then as to other things, whether we succeed in them or not, it will make but little difference in the end. *Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, says our Saviour, and all these things shall be added unto you.*

making his whole fortune at once, and
 being enriched for ever. We ought to
 follow the example of those who have
 found riches in the spirit to the He-
 brews, who disregarding the pleasures of
 this world, and the honours, and con-
 sidering that they were pilgrims and
 strangers in the earth, sought after a
 better country, that is, heaven. For as
 as we have nothing here to lay up, let
 us lay up for ourselves in the world
 to come. Let us not be content with
 what we have, but let us strive to
 have something that may remain with
 us beyond all our present acquisitions.
 The things of this world we are, indeed,
 to far to regard, as our natural necessities
 oblige us: but we are not to spend the
 whole of our time and care upon them.
 It is only the happiness of our souls
 in the invisible world, upon which we ought
 to exert the strength and vigour of our
 thoughts. Let us therefore, look to-
 ward that in the first place; and then as
 to other things, whether we succeed in
 them or not, it will make our little de-
 sires in the end. And as we will the king-
 dom of God and his righteousness, let us
 leave the things of the world to those

S E R M O N III.

The Eternity of God.

P S A L. XC. 2.

*Before the mountains were brought forth, or
ever thou hadst formed the earth and the
world; even from everlasting to everlast-
ing thou art God.*

THE Eternity of God is one of SERM.
III. those adorable attributes, which
justly fill us with awful senti-
ments of his existence and perfection. It
is one of those truths, that are not easily
comprehensible to our imagination, but
of which we are so demonstrably cer-
tain, that the evidence of it cannot be
resisted. And it has always been assented
to by all, who have acknowledged his
being, as evident from the nature of his
existence.

In the holy scriptures, which always
confirm, and illustrate our rational sen-
timents of him, it is very often expressed
in the most sublime and affecting man-
ner,

S E R M.

III.

ner, in order to give us suitable notions of his excellent and transcendent nature. Thus in the text, it is asserted very plainly, that he existed from everlasting, before all material productions whatsoever. *Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world; even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God.* In consideration of which divine perfection, we have in this psalm some reflections on the brevity and fluctuating state of human life; and, indeed, the whole of it seems to be a meditation on our minute and transitory condition in this world, when compared to the Eternity of God; after which, the good Psalmist makes some pious prayers for his pity and compassion to our frailties.

In the following discourse, I shall endeavour

I. To represent to you, that this attribute of *Eternity* must belong to God, and to him only. Then

II. To make some observations, that may be proper to assist our understanding. And

In the last place, I shall make a few practical reflections.

I. Then

I. Then I am to represent to you, that ^{SERM.}
this attribute of *Eternity* must belong to ^{III.}
God, and to him only.

Eternity, when we speak of it, in the most extensive and absolute sense, is that duration of existence, that is without any beginning, and without any end. And when we say, that God is eternal, we mean, that there was no beginning, and shall be no end of his being: that he has been for ever, and will be the same invariably to all futurity. But we may consider Eternity two ways, either from this moment backwards, to an infinite duration, already past, or forwards, to an infinite futurity. And in this last sense, viz. an infinite futurity, angels, and the souls of men, from the time they are created, are eternal in their duration. But in both senses, Eternity can only belong to God, who is ever the same, and whose years shall not fail; and who is justly described by St. John, to be him, *who is, and who was, and is to come.*

Now that this attribute of Eternity, considered as an infinite duration already past, must belong to God, is evident, if we consider him as the first cause of
all

SERM. all things. For the first cause, from
III. which all things flow, must be eternal.
That something must always have been,
we see plainly from the things that exist.
For if there was a time, when nothing
existed, then it would have been impossi-
ble, that any thing could ever have been
brought into being. Nothing would
eternally have produced nothing. And
therefore, as we see things do exist, there
must have been always something, from
which the present things derive their be-
ing. Nothing, that we see, could be the
cause of itself. One thing may be the
effect of another, and that of a third,
and so on, but the chain cannot be infi-
nite, there must be some being, that is
the first cause, which must ever have been
from a necessity of its nature, or that is
eternal. And the being, who thus ex-
ists, as the first cause of all things, is God,
who therefore must have been from Eter-
nity.

It is, indeed, difficult for us to think,
how any being can be eternal, or can
have had no beginning; it seems beyond
the power of our imagination, but we
are as sure, that something must eter-
nally have been, as we are of our own
existence;

existence; because as we know that things do exist, we are certain something must always have been, for things could not be produced without a cause. And therefore, though our narrow minds cannot comprehend it, we are absolutely certain, that this attribute of *Eternity* must belong to God.

S E R M.
III.

And as God is thus eternal, with regard to his duration, already past, so he is also, in respect of futurity. Because as he has ever been, so he can never fail to be, by any weakness in himself, or superior power in any other being. As he is the first cause from which all things have their being and dependence, so nothing can destroy or resist him, that he may not continue the same for ever. But farther, as God is eternal, considered as the first cause of all things, so his Intelligence, his Wisdom, his Power, and moral attributes, must also be eternal. There could be no time, when he could be without any of these. For if there could have been any time, when there was none of them, they could never have been produced from nothing. No being, once without them, could ever acquire them, but from some cause that was possessed of them.

And

S E R M.

III.

And therefore, the first cause of all things must ever have had them. And as certainly as we know the first cause, or God to have been eternal, so we certainly know that he is eternally intelligent, wise, and powerful.

And as our reason thus plainly discovers to us the eternity of God, so in scripture, it is declared to be one of the characters, by which the true God of the universe is distinguished from the false deities, or vanities of the heathen. Thus in the prophecies of Jeremiah ch. x. *The flock, or idol, is a doctrine of vanities—the work of the workman, and of the hands of the founder—but the Lord is the true God, and an everlasting king, or, as it might be much better rendered, the king of eternity.* And in Isa. lvii. he is said to be, *the high and lofty one, that inhabiteth eternity.* In other places, he is styled the *eternal God, the king eternal—the rock of ages, and he whose name and goings forth have been from everlasting.* Other objects of worship are mere fictions, lying vanities, imposed upon mankind by the wickedness of some, and ignorance of others, and that have no existence in the nature of things; but he is the true God, who
eter-

eternally reigns, before whom as he S E R M.
himself has declared by the prophet, there III.
was no God, nor shall there be after
him.

But now in the

II. Place, let us make some observations. And

1. From the Eternity of God, we may observe, that he must exist by a necessity of his nature; that is, he could not have been other than what he is; for what has eternally existed, could not but have been. He must be the principle of perpetual existence to himself. And therefore, he must be absolutely independent, both in his being and operations. And he alone can only be so: all other beings must depend upon him for their existence and powers. And this is what the scripture seems to intimate to us, when he is called by his name *Jehovah*, which signifies, that he is independent in his being, or self-existent. And so in other places, almost the same thing is expressed, when he is said to be *the first*, and *the last*, Isa. xlv. and that he *cannot deny himself*.

2. It may be observed, that as God is eternal, we are not to imagine any succession, or alteration in the manner of
his

S E R M.

III.

his existence. In other beings, their duration brings a continued series of variations. They are in a continual flux, passing from one state to another, and constantly altered in their circumstances by time, either verging toward some farther perfection, or they are declining, and coming to an end: but as he is eternal, there can be no alteration in him. All past, present, and future events, can produce no change in him. And though he comprehends them in one view, and sees them, as they are, in their various succession, he cannot be so affected by them, as to suffer any variation in himself.

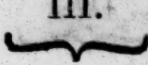
3. We may observe from the Eternity of God, that as he has existed through an infinite time, all the space elapsed from the first beginning of created things must be but as a moment, or nothing, when compared to his duration. It is a finite quantity compared to an infinite, or less than a drop of water in proportion to the ocean. And hence, the holy Psalmist expresses himself thus—*A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday, when it is past, and as a watch in the night,* Psal. xc. 4. And St. Peter, 2 Ep. iii. says,

says, *One day is with the Lord, as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*; SERM.
III.

by which he means, that a thousand years bears no more proportion to his eternal existence than one day, and that the one, as well as the other, has no proportion to his duration. Not as if the apostle signified, that there was no difference with God between the space of a thousand years and a day, but only that the greatest finite time, as well as the smallest, bears no proportion to his eternal duration.

4. Again, we may observe the vanity of that distinction, made by some Divines, between Eternity and time. That Eternity is something fixed like an Instant, that wholly exists in every moment; but that time, and the parts of it, come in their order by continued succession; so that in created things, with regard to their duration, there are some first and last by succession, which they think has no place in Eternity. For on the contrary, it is plain, that Eternity differs only from time, as an infinite quantity does from a finite, that are the same in kind. We cannot separate duration, or time, from our notion of any thing that

E exists;

SERM. exists ; we must either consider it, as having
 III.  ing been through a longer, or shorter period. And therefore, time cannot be separated from our notion of the existence of the divine being himself. We must consider him, as having been through an infinite time, of which, though the parts of it come in succession, they cannot affect the manner of his being, because time may be considered, as distinguished from the being itself, which may, without any succession, invariably continue.

In the last place, we may observe from the Eternity of God, that he can be but one. For it is evident, there cannot be two, or more absolutely eternal beings, because more than one cannot exist by a necessity of their nature. One, eternal, necessary cause, is sufficient for the existence of all things, and therefore, there must be but one. Hence, in some passages, when the words *eternal* and *everlasting*, are applied to material things, or those of a moral nature, the meaning can only be, that they continue for a long time, when compared with other things, or as long as the nature of the subject will allow, or while the present frame of the world can subsist, of which
 it

it would be easy to give a variety of instances. SERM.
III.

Let us now in the last place, make some practical reflections from the whole that has been said. And

I. The Eternity of God, is a just and reasonable ground of our adoration of him. For when we consider him as the eternal king, who was for ever before all things, this must give us awful sentiments of his transcendent nature and perfection. This must represent him, as incomprehensible to us, as infinitely exalted beyond our thoughts. Other beings, whose origin we can trace, whose beginning lies within the reach of our imagination, cannot strike us with so sublime thoughts of their nature. As they approach to us in our condition, we cannot have that reverence and inward admiration enough for them to make them truly objects of our worship. But the contemplation of him, who is *from everlasting to everlasting*, must command our most inward regard; him we cannot but revere, as the eternal author of our being, and of all other existence; who (to use the words of the prophet Isaiah) *before the day was, existed, and before whom there was no God formed,*

SERM. nor shall *there be after him*; and who in
 III. *the beginning laid the foundation of the
 earth, and the heavens are the works of his
 hands.*

2. The consideration of the Eternity of God, leads us to reflect on the transitory state of all other things. He only continues the same for ever, while all other beings are in a fluctuating state. All material things are continually *changing*; even nature herself, the vast machine of the universe, may come to a period, or its laws may change; but the eternal God, after millions of years have revolved, shall be for ever. To use the words of the prophet, *the heavens may vanish away like smoke, and the earth may wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner*; but his *salvation shall be for ever, and his righteousness shall not be abolished*. And therefore, the happiness that flows from him shall be secure. It cannot fade with time, if it depends upon him. Nothing but sin, and rebellion against him, can deprive us of his favour to Eternity. So that, from a review of the uncertain and unstable nature of things; a good man may say with the Psalmist, *Whom have I*
in

in heaven, but thee, and there none is upon SERM.
earth, that I desire besides thee; my flesh and III.
my heart faileth, but God is the strength of
my heart, and my portion for ever.

3. Hence also, we may particularly reflect on our own minuteness, and the brevity of our existence here. *We are but of yesterday, and are soon gone, but his years are throughout all generations. Our days are but as an hand-breadth, our age is as nothing before him, and at our best state we are but vanity. While a thousand years in his sight, are but as a watch in the night, we are carried away, as with a flood, like the grass that groweth up. And this consideration of our short and transitory state here, may give us hopes in the goodness of God, of mercy and compassion from him: that, as we are such minute creatures, he will be merciful to our sinful failures; that he will not set our iniquities before him, to use the words of the Psalmist, nor our secret sins in the light of his countenance, but that as a father pitieth his children, so he will pity those who fear him.*

4. That God is eternal, is also just ground of comfort and satisfaction to good men. For as he lives for ever, his

S E R M. Wisdom, his Power, and Goodness can
III. never fail, and his favour and mercies
may be continued for ever. In the most distant ages, and to eternity, he may be relied upon: he will ever be a refuge to them that fear him. *Trust ye in the Lord for ever* (says the prophet Isaiah) *for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.* Besides him, there is none, in whom we can always trust, and who can be eternally our security and strength. In man we see there is often no help; he is suddenly gone, and at his *best state*, he is *altogether vanity*, so that when we depend upon him, we are often deceived. He often cannot reach to us his assistance in this short space of our being, and far less through the ages of the invisible world. But as God invariably exists through Eternity, there can be no alteration in his power and purposes, in any revolutions of time. And therefore, whatever he has promised in the most distant periods, shall be made effectual. That eternal reward, that everlasting crown, which is promised to good men, shall be secure, as it comes from him, who is ever faithful to his promises, and is eternally powerful to bestow it upon them.

As

As he reigns, and is ever glorious through S E R M.
endless ages, so the glory cannot fade, ^{III.}
that is derived from him. He is the
eternal and inexhaustible fountain, from
which happiness shall continually flow.
And therefore,

5. This consideration, that God is eternal, gives us an amiable view of the blessed enjoyments of the saints and angels in heaven. For as God is eternal and unchangeable, the happiness, in which he has placed them and promised to them, shall never come to an end. And this will compleat and enhance all their joys and pleasures, that they shall never fail; that when millions of ages are past, the everlasting God will continually supply them; his goodness will ever survive, and cherish, and bless them, and he will be their portion for ever. And O! what a pleasing prospect it must give them to reflect, that there shall be no limited time to their felicity; that as God lives for ever (to use the words of the Psalmist) the *rivers of pleasures, and joys that are at his right hand*, shall never be exhausted. Nature may come to a period, and the whole frame of the universe may be dissolved, but the goodness of our God

SERM. shall continue for ever, to them who
 III. shall be accounted worthy of his salvation.

In the last place, the Eternity of God ought to give terror to wicked men, to those who rebel against his laws and government. They have just ground to fear, that, as they are at enmity with him, their happiness will ever be opposed and destroyed by him, who ever exists and reigns to take vengeance upon them. He can reach them in any state of their being, and make them everlasting examples of his justice. Their punishment he can eternally continue, and who knows, or can describe the power of his anger, that may be exerted through endless ages. The wrath of an earthly prince, whose breath is in his nostrils, may often be easily evaded; for his envy and hatred sometimes suddenly perish with him; but alas! who can deliver from the wrath of the eternal king of the universe: no length of time can limit his power and vengeance. *Consider this, all ye who forget God! Fear him who can destroy both body and soul in hell, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.*

S E R M O N IV.

The Translation of ENOCH.

G E N E S I S V. 24.

And Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.

TH E S E words contain a short ac- S E R M.
IV.
count of one of the patriarchs who lived before the flood; and who is distinguished to all generations, by the noble character which is here given of him, and the wonderful manner of his Translation. He lived in the times when men began to corrupt themselves, and when God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth; and he was, we may suppose, a living Example of righteousness, to a vicious and debauched world. He was one of those witnesses to the truth, whom God sometimes raises up, to give their testimony to religion and virtue, in the midst of a general apostacy.

There

SERM.

IV.

There is something very remarkable in this description of Enoch, that he *walked with God*; it implies, that he behaved continually, as in the sight of God; that his conversation was so pure and holy, that he seemed to have God always before him; that he so accommodated himself to the will of God, that he walked, as it were, with him, as with a friend; he appeared to live with God, and to pass his life wholly devoted to his service. The phrase, in the Hebrew, might be literally rendered, *He set himself to walk after God*, that is, he gave himself continually to obey the commandments, and follow the instructions of God, which is to walk after him. And much to the same purpose, the Chaldean paraphrase expresses it, *And he walked in the fear of God*. And the Arabick version, *that he walked in obedience to God*. But the seventy interpreters in their version, have given a more general sense of it, by rendering it, *And Enoch pleased God*; which the apostle seems to regard in the epistle to the Hebrews, xi. 5. when he says, that Enoch—*had this testimony, that he pleased God*. But all these different versions amount nearly to the same thing, and express the character

racter which was also given of Zacharias SERM.
and his wife Elizabeth; *that they were* IV.
righteous before God, walking in all the
commandments and ordinances of the Lord
blameless.

The account of him, added in the text, *and he was not, for God took him*, is still more singular, as it plainly intimates, that he did not die as the rest of the children of Adam, but that he was translated, or taken from hence into the heavenly kingdom, as an example and evidence to the world, of immortality and glory in a life to come. The phrase, *and he was not*, in the original, signifies, that he *was not seen any more*, that he was not found, or did not appear any more in this world. For *God took him*, that is, took him to himself into heaven: not the soul only, as is the case of all good men until the resurrection, but his whole person, soul and body, into heaven. The Samaritan version says, that *his angel*, that is, the angel of God took him. And the Chaldean paraphrase says, *and he did not appear, nor did God slay him*. But the apostle, in the epistle to the Hebrews, more clearly expresses it, by *Faith*, says he, *Enoch was translated, that he should not see death, and*
was

SERM. *was not found, because God had translated*
IV. *him.* So that the assumption of Enoch into heaven, without death, just as Elijah was taken, is made plain from the authority of the apostle, as well as Moses. The son of Sirach also declares the same thing, *Upon the earth, says he, was no man created like Enoch, for he was taken from the earth,* Ecclus. xlix. It may seem a little wonderful, perhaps, that so extraordinary an event should be recorded by Moses in so few words, but it should be observed at the same time, that he took this short account of it, probably, from some ancient Monuments, which were before his time, without adding any thing of his own to them; as it became a faithful historian to do.

The text being thus explained, it will give us occasion

- I. To consider, what light concerning a future state, Enoch's translation gave, before the coming of Christ. And
- II. To explain, more particularly, his character, that he *walked with God*; which qualified him for this signal distinction.

I. Then

I. Then let us consider, what light SERM.
IV. concerning a life to come, the translation of Enoch gave to the world, before the coming of Christ. And there were two things very plainly pointed out by it, first, that there is another state of being hereafter, to which the present is only an introduction, since Enoch was taken from this earth, immediately unto God, without suffering any symptom of mortality; and secondly, that this other state of existence, is a state of rewards and punishments, wherein good men are to be recompensed for their virtue of which Enoch, for his righteousness, was made such an illustrious example. And this was a great advantage to the world in those early ages, as well as to posterity. For such a remarkable thing was calculated, to have stronger influence on the minds of men, than any discovery of a life to come by tradition, or any rational deduction. It must amaze and strike them with awful notions of religion and goodness. And, indeed, without some views of a future state, so inculcated either from reason, or from a revelation, men cannot be governed. There can be
no

SERM. no curbing of their passions, and bringing them to a sense of their duty, unless they are overawed by some principles of this kind.

IV.

In the first ages of the world, immediately after the creation; it is reasonable to think, that there were some intimations given of an After-state, besides what they might gather from their own observation and reflection. It is true, that men of themselves, especially those who have a comprehensive view of things, may often, by accurate observation of the conduct of providence in this world, meet with reason to be convinced of it; but as there are difficulties and objections that sometimes occur, the conviction would be stronger and more effectual, if there were added a positive and clear revelation of its truth. Therefore it may justly be imagined, that God would not leave men only to their own thoughts and reasonings about it, which were likely to be so very vague and uncertain. We may reasonably presume, the first of mankind, even our first parents had some express revelation given them of a life to come. But then it is plain, that whatever declaration they had
of

of it must have been at the time of Enoch's translation, either entirely forgotten, or but little regarded. For at that time, near the age of Noah, about 1000 years after the creation, we read that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, which shews, that the views of an After-state were either lost, or made no impression. And therefore the event of Enoch's translation must have been, as another, and perhaps a stronger intimation, of a future existence, by which, as the son of Sirach says, he was *an example of repentance to all generations*, xliv. 16. SERM.
IV.

In the succeeding ages, from the time of Enoch, till the translation of Elijah the prophet, we find no direct declaration of a life to come, but only some obscure hints of it, unless we allow the book of Job to have been written within that time, in which indeed he is represented, as declaring his belief of an After-State. *Tho' after my skin, says he, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.* In all the five books of Moses, there is no mention made of it; but only by implication, in that description God gives of himself to Moses, *I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*, which our Saviour

SERM.

IV.

Saviour understands, as that those Patriarchs did continue their existence, and yet live in the sight of God; for he is not *the God of the dead*, says he, *but of the living*; for *all live unto him*. And from Moses unto king David, there is only one passage in the xviith Psalm, in which the Psalmist says, *deliver my soul—from the men of the world which have their portion in this life.—As for me—I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness*. Where the expression, *I awake*, alludes to the *sleep of death*, as if he expected after death *another existence*.

But in the Translation of Elijah to heaven, of which we have a particular account, 2 Kings ii. there is another clear discovery of an After-state, seeing that his existence was not finished on earth, So that these two, Enoch and Elijah, may be considered, as the two witnesses under the old testament, to the truth of a life to come. And the Jews could not be ignorant of it, as it was so strongly represented by such examples. These two are, indeed, the only sure and clear evidences of an after-state, till after the Jewish captivity in Babylon. And it is probable, they had their effect, in exciting

citing men to righteousness. For it SERM.
could not but appear, that those two IV.
men were rewarded with immortality and
glory, for their extraordinary virtue and
goodness; and therefore, that those who
were followers of them in their practice,
had reason also to hope for another ex-
istence, though they were not in the
same manner translated into it. From
this time of Elijah's Translation, there is
no mention made of an after-life, till
the time of Daniel, who expresses it in the
strongest manner, ch. xii. *Many of them,*
says he, that sleep in the dust of the earth,
shall awake, some to everlasting life, and
some to everlasting shame and contempt.

The ancient Jews then, from the as-
sumption of Enoch and Elijah into hea-
ven, and other notices given them, had
plain intimations of a future state. And
that party among them, the Sadducees,
who believed nothing of it, neither an-
gel nor spirit, must likewise have believed
nothing of their antient scriptures; they
may have only conformed to the external
ceremonies of their law, for the ends of
government, and to keep well with the
better and religious part of their people.
They seem to have been the Free-thinkers,

S E R M. or Deists of those days, who believed no-
IV. thing at all of any divine revelation.

But even in those times of the Old Testament, the heathen nations seem to have been at a great loss, concerning this great and important truth. In some of them, the notion of it, either by tradition, or from reason, seems to have been entirely defaced or lost; though no doubt, there were a few of the people of discernment and speculation in every country, who saw into it, from the consideration of what passed in their own minds, and from the moral attributes of God. Herodotus, a Greek historian of great credit, tells us, that the antient Greeks, had their first notions of the immortality of the soul from the Egyptians, by the travelling of some of their great men into Egypt; and the Egyptians, no doubt, had it from the Jews, their neighbours, who had been experimentally convinced of it, from the Translations of Enoch and Elijah. But in general, the heathen world seems to have been in a state of great uncertainty and darkness about a future life; and in this condition, they remained till the coming of our Saviour, who was given as *a light to lighten*

lighten the Gentiles, and who brought life and immortality to light by his gospel. SERM.
IV.

Let us now go on to the

II. Thing proposed, to explain more particularly, this remarkable character of Enoch, that he *walked with God*, which qualified him for such a distinction. Now that he *walked with God*, signifies in the

1. Place, that he lived continually as in the sight of God, or that he considered himself, as ever observed by him. This is evidently implied in the phrase, for he who walks with another is constantly in his view, and observed by him, which obliges him to act in a proper and decent manner. And therefore, to walk with God, is to behave ourselves as constantly in his view, and regarded by him. God, from the perfection of his nature, is every where present, and for ever with us; *he is about our path, and about our bed, and spies out all our ways.* Now to walk with him, is to have a just and solid impression of this on our minds, and always to reflect, that as we are in his presence, we should act in such a manner as may be pleasing to him.—It is to regard his all-seeing Eye, that penetrates

SERM. into our most secret behaviour, and to
 IV. which the darkness and the light are both
 alike.—It is to act always with a desire
 to approve ourselves before him, what-
 ever a vicious and ill-natured world may
 think of us. To be under the observa-
 tion of men, especially such as are emi-
 nent for their wisdom and virtue, often
 constrains us to a decent and proper be-
 haviour; the reflection on their presence
 and character, fills us with awe and re-
 verence of them, and we are inclined to
 wish for their esteem. How much more
 then ought this consideration to have an
 influence upon us, that we are ever in
 the divine presence, under the all-seeing
 eye of our Maker, of him who will be
 our judge? Such a sense, such a regard
 for the Omniscience of God, will strength-
 en the mind, and keep us steady in
 the practice of our duty. It will affect
 us in our most secret retirement, when
 screened from the view of every mortal
 observer.

2. Further and more particularly, to
 walk with God is, to use the words of
 the Psalmist, to *walk in his ways*, cxix. 3.
 or, as it is elsewhere expressed, *to walk in*
the commandments and ordinances of the Lord,
 that

that is, in the paths of virtue and goodness. For no one can be said to walk with God, who does not regard his commandments and institutions, and what these are, is easily known, from our natural notions of right and wrong, as well as from the description of them, which is given to us in God's holy word. So that we may clearly see, what it is to walk with God in our moral conduct. It is to be governed by his laws in all our actions, and in all our designs; it is to have the heart and disposition entirely conformable to them. He therefore, that walks with God, will never allow himself in the practice of any known sin; he will never suffer himself to deviate into any vicious habits, but will endeavour to guard against every thing, that has the appearance of evil, or that may be doubtful, as to its moral rectitude. He will set the divine character in goodness, mercy, and truth before him, as the perfect pattern of his conduct. And though his finite nature and weakness, will never suffer him to attain, his constant endeavour will be to copy its perfection. Again

S E R M.
IV.

SERM.

IV.

3. To walk with God, may signify, to be frequently employed in religious duties, to be often, as it were, conversant with God and divine things. And this is more especially to walk with God, to be often with him in solemn acts of devotion, in adoration, in prayer, in praises and thanksgiving. In adoration, the soul is struck with the highest sense, and admiration of the divine attributes and glory, and considers them, and trusts in them, as the fountain of all its happiness for ever. In prayer, there is expressed a dependence upon him, for his assistance in our wants and difficulties in this imperfect state. And as there often occur some necessities and troubles, we are daily summoned to this duty. And in praise and thanksgiving, we declare our sense of the goodness and mercies of God, how benevolent he is to us, and how liberally he bestows, what is suitable for us. Now in these divine duties, a person may justly be said to be with God, and to be more immediately in his presence. And a well disposed mind finds the highest pleasure and entertainment, and *takes delight in approaching to God*, Isa. lviii. 2. In such exercises, the soul

relin-

relinquishes worldly objects, it rises above them, and is immediately conversant with heaven. And for the mind to be thus engaged, is the most exalted state of human nature; and it becomes a rational creature, who has a just sense of the majesty and glory of his Creator, and his dependence upon him. And this is truly to walk with God, to be often employed in those religious duties, in which the soul may be said to have nearer access unto him. S E R M.
IV.

In the last place, this character to walk with God, may signify, to be at peace, and in friendship with him. *Can two walk together*, says the prophet Amos, *except they be agreed*, iii. 3 Walking together signifies, the persons have a friendly disposition to one another; or if they have been at variance, that they are reconciled again. And therefore, to *walk with God*, is to be at peace with him, to do always what is pleasing to him, and to avoid what may offend him. But as all men often fail in their duty and fall into sin, those who would walk with him must regain his favour, when they have offended, and be reconciled to him, in the method he himself has proposed.

SERM. And as he is infinitely gracious and merciful, he will accept of the returning sinner, and restore him to his grace and favour. But in the gospel, we are told, that our reconciliation can only be effected by the Mediator, whom he has appointed.—And thus it appears, what this character of Enoch was, that he *walked with God*, by which he was qualified to be an example of glory and immortality to all ages.

From what has been said, we may make the following reflections. In the

1. Place we may see, that holiness here, and glory hereafter, are always connected. Enoch was remarkable among the Patriarchs, for his sanctity of life, and his character, that he walked with God, and therefore, he was singled out to be an instance and evidence to the world of glory and immortality. This is the established law of heaven, and the order of things that can never be reversed, that he, who is innocent and holy in this state of probation, shall be happy hereafter; but that the impenitent, the wicked, and profane, shall forfeit that happiness. And here the good and virtuous may comfort themselves, that,

that, as God has at all times declared this, SERM.
they may be well assured of their eternal IV.
reward.

2. We may observe, that God has in all ages given sufficient assurances of a life to come, not only by several notices or declarations of it, but by plain examples. In the Patriarchal ages when men began to corrupt themselves, and fall from their primitive innocence, he gave a strong intimation of it by the assumption of Enoch; and then afterwards, in the corrupted times of the Jewish church, by that of Elijah; and last of all, by the resurrection and ascension of our blessed Saviour. So that this grand truth has been abundantly declared, and illustrated to the world, besides all the evidence for it from the deductions of reason. God has been pleased in his goodness, to leave all men inexcusable, and to give them a plain rule for obtaining glory and happiness. And if they will not be persuaded to follow the light that is given them, the fault must rest upon themselves, when by their own wicked and perverse conduct, they become eternal sufferers.

3. We

SERM.
IV.

3. We may see, that the substance of true and rational religion has been nearly the same in all ages ; viz. Faith in God and Holiness of life in *walking with him*, and the belief of a life to come. The religion of the Patriarchs, of Moses, and the gospel, all tend to direct men to everlasting life and happiness; and they shew, that there is but one path, that of virtue and goodness, which will safely conduct us to it. In this plain path then, let us persist, so shall we at length arrive at those heavenly mansions, which alone are worthy our pursuit, because in them alone our wishes can be compleated.

S E R M O N V.

The Power of God.

P S A L. LXII. II.

*God hath spoken once ; twice have I heard
this, that Power belongeth unto God.*

THE Power of God, is that aw-^{SERM.}
ful attribute, by which all his ^{V.}
other perfections are made ef-
fectual to any purpose ; and for the effi-
cacy of which, we praise him in his won-
derful works. Without it, his Wisdom,
Goodness, and other attributes, could not
have brought things into being, nor
govern them when they are made. So
that infinite *Power*, added to intellectual
and moral perfection, compleats his cha-
racter as a perfect being ; nor can we
have any notion of a supreme Deity,
without thinking him infinite in this at-
tribute. *God hath spoken once, and twice
have I heard this, that Power belongeth
unto God.*

The

SERM.

V.

The plain meaning of which words, if we omit their connection with the rest of the psalm, seems to be, that God hath declared sufficiently by his works, that Power belongeth unto him. The phrase, *God hath spoken once, and twice*, is an usual manner of speaking, as might be easily shewn from various instances in different languages; by which writers express the repetition of an event, a definite number of times for an indefinite. And by which the Psalmist here signifies, that God had plainly shewn his Power, by repeated acts of it in his works of creation and providence, and that he himself had often seen and heard of it. At the creation, *God spake once*, or declared his Power, when he called the things that were not, as though they were. And frequently since, he has likewise, spoken in the wonderful events of his providence, both in the natural and moral world; sometimes by surprising effects of it, brought about from hidden causes, in the ordinary course of things; and at other times, by supernatural acts, when the circumstances of things required his extraordinary interposition.

In

In the following discourse, I shall endeavour

SERM.

V.

I. Briefly to represent to you, that God must have infinite Power, and mention some instances of it.

II. I shall make some observations on his exercise of it in the universe. And

Lastly, deduce some practical reflections.

I. Then I am to endeavour to represent to you, that God must have infinite Power, and to mention some instances of it. The notion of Power, we acquire by observing the changes which are made on the things that are about us, or the effects that are produced in the application of one thing to another. Thus from the effects of fire, of the sun, of gravity, and the like, or the changes made by them on all bodies, we have the notion of *their power*. And in living and intelligent agents, from the things that are actuated or effected by them, we have still more lively apprehensions of their power. And the different manner of their acting upon things, and the various effects of their acting, gives us the notion

SERM. tion of the various degrees of it. So that

V.

Power is the *fitness*, or *capacity* of any thing to produce an effect. And when it is ascribed unto God, it is that perfection of his nature, by which he can do whatever he pleases, and hinder whatever he will not have done. Now as God is the first cause of all things, from whom they have their being, and are made what they are; it is plain that he must be possessed of Power in the most eminent and transcendent manner; because whatever power any other agents have, must be derived from him; and he must have been possessed of it before they can acquire it. It must eternally and necessarily have existed in him. And hence, when we consider him as the cause of all present existence, and the fountain from whence all things must come, that can possibly exist, we cannot but allow him to be infinitely powerful. This our reason plainly dictates to us, that God, the first cause of all things, the first principle of all activity and power, must himself be infinitely powerful.

But when we reflect farther, on the amazing instances of his power in the universe, the many awful demonstrations

tions of it that are in his wonderful S E R M.
works, this will give us still a more af- V.
fecting proof. Thus when we look up
to the heavens, and see those immense
and glorious bodies, the sun, moon, and
stars, revolving in their orbs, and placed
at their proper distances, and perform-
ing their motions with the greatest re-
gularity, and how light is diffused from
the sun with an inconceivable swiftness,
and accompanied with heat to cherish
and enliven the planets, we cannot but
have awful sentiments of the power of
him who made them. In like manner,
when we contemplate the earth, the con-
nection of its parts, its figure, and how
it is compacted together, and equally
balanced with land and seas, and fitted
for the various seasons, from the changes
of the heavenly influence, we may plainly
see the hand of the omnipotent Architect.
Again, when we look round us, and ob-
serve that powerful principle of vegeta-
tion in plants and herbs, by which they
grow, and come to their maturity, and
are fitted for their various purposes, and
that when they languish and decay in
the winter, and are many of them buried
in the earth, they revive and rise up with
new

SERM. new vigour and beauty, in the spring,
V. we cannot but admire the divine enliven-
ing power: or, when we behold the
astonishing number of animals that are
placed on our globe, infinitely various in
their size, their construction, their figure,
and manner of subsisting; some formed
to creep or move on the earth, some to
live in the water, others in the air, and
all fitted with a vast variety of subtil
parts and fluids, and withal clothed pro-
perly for their state, having suitable food
and nourishment provided for their vari-
ous kinds; I say, when a rational obser-
ver sees all this, he cannot but be struck
with wonder at the power of the Crea-
tor, who thus framed and endued all of
them with a principle of life and action,
fitted to their different orders: or, when
we consider our own frame, how *fear-
fully and wonderfully we are made*, how we
subsist, how the animal life is preserved,
and how the soul and body are so per-
fectly united as to make one conscious
being, we may see with surprise, the al-
mighty power illustrated even within
ourselves; or lastly, when we reflect on
the vast number of such intelligent and
rational agents in the world, as every
moment

moment live and act by the divine influence, and whose faculties give us the image of God himself, we cannot but wonder at that incomprehensible power, by which all those have their existence. The scale of being, that rises gradually from the lowest degree of sensation to the highest and most exalted spirits, gives us an amazing view of the extent of the divine creative power. And thus from these general instances, besides an infinite variety of particulars, that cannot now be enumerated, the divine power is obvious to every observer. *Who can declare the mighty acts of the Lord, or shew forth all his praise?* All nature, in all her operations, is one continued illustration of this divine attribute.

And as from reason and observation, we see that God must be infinitely powerful, so the holy scriptures often express this in the most sublime and affecting manner. Thus at the creation, things are said instantaneously to have been brought into being, by the word of his power. God said, *Let there be light, and there was light*; and God said, *let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit-tree yielding fruit after his kind,*

G

and

S E R M.
V.

SERM. *and it was so.*

V.

ation are thus said to have been done at his command, which is the strongest representation possible of his power. By the word of the Lord, says the Psalmist, xxxiii. 6. *were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth—for he spake and it was done, he commanded, and it stood fast.* And elsewhere, his power is represented as irresistible and uncontrollable, and beyond all our imagination; *who hath hardened himself against him, says Job, ix. 5. and hath prospered?—who shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble? who commandeth the sun and it riseth not, and sealeth up the stars; who alone spreadeth out the heavens—who doeth great things past finding out, yea, and wonders without number.* And to the same purpose, in the prophecies of Jeremiah li. 15. *He hath made the earth by his power; when he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens, and he causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth, he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures.* And again, ch. v. 22. *Fear ye not me? saith the Lord, will ye not tremble at my presence, who have placed*

placed the sand for the bound of the sea, by a ^{SERM.} perpetual decree that it cannot pass it; and ^{V.} though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it? And he doth according to his will, says the prophet Daniel, iv. 35. in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, what doest thou? These are lively descriptions of the Divine Power, which acts at all times in the universe, and continues the various productions of things; that power which brought into being the whole assemblage of them, and can crush them again into nothing.

But now in the

II. Place, let us make some observations on the *Exercise* of this Power.

And

i. We may observe the manifest difference between the *divine*, and all other *created* power. The power of God brings things into being, and afterwards acts upon them; but created power only acts upon them, after they exist. The divine power, to use the words of the apostle, calls the things that are not, as though they

S E R M. they were ; it can produce all possible existence, but the power of other agents can only operate upon, model, or effect some change upon things. Creative power, or the production of existence, belongs only to God ; this is the distinguishing characteristic of the power of the God of the universe. It is true, we can have no notion of the manner of acting in such a power, how things can be brought into being ; but we see plainly, that God must be possessed of it ; unless we suppose, that the substance of all things was eternal, and consequently that there are more eternal and self-existent beings than one ; and that matter itself is necessarily existent, which we know to be absurd and inconsistent with its nature.

2. We may observe, that the Divine Power can effect every purpose intended, with the greatest ease, without any difficulty, and without any expence of time, as in a moment. For if things have their being from him, and depend upon him, and he can call any thing into existence that he pleases, it is plain, that nothing can resist his will, nothing can retard or hinder his designs. He cannot labour
under

under any difficulties; nor can there be S E R M.
any thing uneasy to him in the exercise V.
of his power. *The everlasting God, the*
Lord, says the prophet Ifaiah, xl. 23.
the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth
not, nor is weary. As all possible exist-
ence is at his command, he can never
want the proper means for executing
his purpose. And therefore, no length
of time can be requisite for his perform-
ance of any thing; for that always sup-
poses some defect of means, or something
that may hinder the event. And hence,
in the scripture, the great acts of God
are often said to be done with the greatest
ease, and in a moment: thus at the re-
surrection, the apostle tells us, 1 Cor. xv.
that in a moment, in the twinkling of an
eye, the dead shall be raised incorruptible,
and we shall be changed.

3. Hence also we may observe, the ab-
surdity and folly of that opinion of the
antient *Manichees*, that there is an evil
Being, or cause of evil, that stands in
opposition to God, and independent of
him, and produces all the evil in the uni-
verse; which notion they seemed to have
acquired, by reflecting on the wickedness
of mankind, and not being able suffici-

S E R M. V.
 {
 ently to account for the cause of moral evil. But it is evident, there can be no being independent on God, or that maintain an opposition to him. For there can be but one first cause of all things ; all existence must come from one. And therefore, if every being must depend upon him for its existence, and powers, there can be no resisting him ; the united powers of all other beings must be as nothing before him. When he withdraws his supply of their powers, they must vanish into nothing. But God may nevertheless, for the purposes of his government, permit free and rational creatures to act in opposition to him, that is, to do evil and to promote moral evil in the world. And hence, we read in the scriptures, that the devil or evil angels, by the divine permission, endeavour to resist and frustrate the work of God in the world ; though it is plain, his uncontrollable power could easily destroy or restrain them. And in this view of the permission of evil by providence, God is said, Isa. xlv. 7. *to make peace and create evil* ; and it is also said of him, *can there be evil in the city and the Lord hath not done it ?*

4. Nevertheless, we may observe, that S E R M.
this almighty power has its just and ra- V.
tional limits. It cannot be extended to
any thing that is absurd, unreasonable,
or that would argue an imperfection in
his nature; for to effect such things
would be weakness and folly. Nor can it
do any thing that implies a contradiction
or impossibility; such as to make the
same thing to be, and not to be, or to
make the whole to be equal to its part,
or that the same body should be in two
or more places at once; because such
things are not the rational objects of
power. For power can only extend to
what is possible, and consistent with the
nature of things. And therefore, we
should never suffer ourselves to be imposed
upon with religious notions of the divine
power, that involve a contradiction; for
they must certainly be false, whatever spe-
cious pretences they may have; and here,
by the way, we may see, that the doctrine
of transubstantiation must be false; be-
cause it implies a contradiction, which is
inconsistent with the Divine Power. For
it supposes the body of Christ, which as-
cended to heaven, to be in a variety of
places at once, both in heaven; and in

S E R M. all those places on the earth, where the
 V. sacrament of the Lord's-supper is administered.

5. Again, it may be observed, that the Power of God will not do any thing that is morally evil. For this would be to act inconsistently with his Wisdom, and Goodness, and all his other attributes. It would argue a weakness, folly, and wrong disposition in the agent; which cannot without blasphemy and absurdity be attributed to God: and therefore, we may be assured, that he cannot be the author of moral evil. He cannot be the author of sin or wickedness, he cannot do any thing that is cruel, malicious, unjust, or that implies a falsehood. Whatsoever he does must be just and right, though we may not be able often to comprehend it. Surely, as it is said in the book of Job, xxxiv. 12. *God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment.* Not but that God has a natural power to do evil, but he will not; his will is so directed by the most perfect wisdom, goodness, and truth, that it is impossible his power should be employed to do what is evil.

In

In the last place, it may be observed, SERM.
V.
that the almighty Power of God is not a lawless and arbitrary power, directed by no reasonable principles; it acts in the most perfect manner, with Wisdom and Goodness. Not that the action of the Divine Power makes the purpose to which it is employed, right and good, as some have imagined, but it acts because the thing itself is right and proper and consonant to wisdom. And therefore, to use the words of the Psalmist, as *he ruleth by his power for ever*, so directed, his dominion must be the most amiable and perfect pattern of government: it is not like the arbitrary power of the tyrants of the earth, who are influenced by their passions and follies, and often wantonly exercise their power to the misery of their subjects; but it is conducted with the most affectionate regard for the happiness of the universe. All the creatures of God in the animal world feel the happy effects of it in their daily sustenance, and those of them who are rational, see the benevolent purposes, to which it is constantly applied.

Let

SERM.

V.

Let us now in the



Last place, make some practical reflections on this subject. And

1. From the consideration of the acts of Divine Power, we have just cause to adore and praise him, because that by this we are and were created. *It is his power that made us, and not we ourselves, we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.* All nature proclaims his power, every thing exists by it, and by this we live, move, and have our being. And it will ever induce the most exalted beings to adore him to endless ages. To use the words of the Psalmist, *One generation shall praise his works to another, and declare his mighty power.* All rational creatures ought to join with the heavenly chorus in the book of Rev. xv. 3, 4. *Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God almighty—who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name?*

2. The reflection on the divine power, ought to shew us the proper use of our little power in the world. As the power of God is always used for the most benevolent purposes, and ever conducted with wisdom and goodness, to the end of promoting

moving general happiness; so ought we with our inferior power to increase the happiness of all around us; and to employ our little abilities in our station, in such an amiable way, is to act in a godlike manner, and to be a blessing to all those who are concerned with us in any connection. It is to act as the children of God our heavenly Father, who as he is powerful, is tender and compassionate to all his creatures.

3. The power of God, is to good men a reasonable ground of trust and confidence in him. When universal nature fails, when there is no help in man, or any of the creatures, the Divine Power is always able to assist us. It can relieve our wants, it can raise unexpected assistance, and set us up in safety from all our fears. When we are involved in trouble, and surrounded with difficulties and dangers on every side, if it is proper for his wisdom and goodness to relieve us, his powerful arm can easily command our deliverance. *Blessed is he who hath the God of Jacob for his help, and whose hope is in the Lord his God, Psalm xlv. 3. He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think, Eph. iii. 20.*

Or,

SERMON. Or, as it is said in the book of Job,
 V. *He can deliver in six troubles, yea even in
 seven; in famine he can redeem from death,
 and in war from the power of the sword.*
 If we are sure of his almighty power to
 protect us, we may then say with the
 Psalmist, *God is our refuge and strength,
 a very present help in trouble; therefore
 will not we fear, though the earth be re-
 moved, and the mountains carried into the
 midst of the sea.*

In the last place, the consideration of
 the power of God ought to be matter of
 terror to vicious and wicked men. As
 they have acted in opposition to him,
 as it were in open rebellion against him,
 they may justly fear that his almighty
 power will take vengeance upon them.
 And who can defy his power and screen
 them from his omnipotent arm? It can
 crush them in a moment, and bring
 them down to swift destruction. To
 use the words of the prophet Amos—
*He that fleeth of them, shall not flee away;
 and he that escapeth of them, shall not be
 delivered. Though they dig into hell, thence
 shall his hand take them; and though they
 climb up into heaven, thence will he bring
 them down.* Nothing can be more terri-
 ble,

The Power of God.

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VI.

ble, than to be at enmity with the powerful God of the universe ; for alas ! who can deliver from his hands ? The whole assemblage of created beings can make no resistance against him. *Consider this Divine Power, all ye who forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, while there is none to deliver you.*

S E R-

ble than to be at enmity with the power-
ful God of the universe; for alas! who
can deliver from his hands? The whole
assault of created beings can make
no resistance against him. Confess this
Divine Power, O ye who forget God, ye
be true you in power, while there is none to
deliver you.

S E R M O N VI.

The Justice of God.

REVELATION, XV. 3.

*Just and true are thy ways, thou King of
saints.*

WHEN we consider God as the S E R M.
VI.
sovereign of the universe, who
has all power and dominion,
we cannot but have the most exalted and
awful thoughts of him ; but when we
reflect farther, that he is of a moral cha-
racter, that he regards the happiness of
all his creatures, and always acts towards
them in righteousness and truth, this is
much more interesting to us, and give us
a still more affecting view of him ; it is
a just matter of praise and thanksgiving,
that we are under his equitable govern-
ment, that he over-rules all for the best
and most benevolent purposes, and that
all rational agents may join with the hea-
venly company described by St. John, in
their song of praise, in the words of the
text ;

SERM. text; *Just and true are thy ways, thou King*
 VI. *of saints.*

These words are part of that form of praise and thanksgiving, which the martyrs and saints are represented to have, after they were delivered from their persecutions and troubles in this life, on account of their faith and religion. It is called the song of Moses, because it is to the same purpose, though not in the same words, with that which he composed after the deliverance of Israel from the Egyptians, at the Red Sea. St. John says, *he saw them that had got the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, having the harps of God; and they sung the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty, just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints!* When those blessed spirits had finished their course, and got beyond all their troubles and uneasiness here, they saw clearly the Justice and reasonableness of God's government; they had a more extensive view of the divine scheme, and they plainly discovered that nothing could be wanting to carry on the infinitely wise purposes

purposes of providence for themselves, and for the general good. In this state
indeed, (such are the mists and clouds that obstruct our sight), we imagine difficulties and objections to the Justice and government of God, which a clearer and more enlarged view would dispel and dissipate. But nevertheless, we may always see so far into the nature of things, and discover so much of the perfection of God, that we may certainly conclude, he is infinitely just and true in his conduct to the children of men. It is remarkable, that in the text, the Almighty is stiled *King of saints*; which seems to signify, that though he has a dominion over all his creatures, he has a more particular and amiable sway over his saints; that he is their king by their choice and willing subjection; that while others resist and rebel against him, they gladly submit to his righteous government, and he defends and takes care of their happiness. *Just and true are thy ways; thou King of saints.*

To be just and true among men, signifies to give to every one what he has a reasonable claim to, regarding the common utility; or to distribute rewards and

H

punish-

SERM. VI. punishments, as the truth of the case
 and circumstances of the objects require.

And in a more enlarged sense, it is to do what is right and fit, according to the nature and truth of things. And in the same manner it is to be understood with respect to God, only in an infinitely more perfect and excellent degree. *Justice* must be the same in kind with God, and among men. For if it is not the same we cannot reason at all about it, nor can we know whether he is possessed of any such perfections. And in general, all the moral attributes of God must agree with our notions of moral perfection, or else it is impossible for us to know whether he is of a moral character or not; and if there is any room to doubt in this case, such a doubt leads directly to atheism.

In discoursing farther on this subject, I shall endeavour to prove,

- I. That God is perfectly just and true in his ways.
- II. To show how he exercises this moral attribute among his creatures.
- III. To obviate some difficulties that may be objected to the *Justice* of his government. And

Lastly,

Lastly, to draw some practical inferences. SERM.
VI.

I. I am to endeavour to represent to you that God is perfectly just. It is evident, that we naturally think *Justice* a good disposition, or habit of mind, from our reflection upon the reasonableness and importance of it. It seems to be the plain dictate of nature, engraven upon the hearts of all men; it is our natural notion of right and wrong, founded upon the reason and truth of things. Now if *Justice* is our natural perception, it is plain that he who formed our nature, must have the same kind of perception and sentiments, though in an infinitely more perfect manner. Our minds must be an imperfect transcript, or likeness of his own infinite mind; and therefore God himself must be just, who has implanted in us those notions of Justice and righteousness. For it is impossible for us to imagine, that he would have formed our minds contrary to his own nature, and the immutable relation of things. And as God has all knowledge and understanding, he can never be deceived with any false appearance; he

SERM.

VI.

must always see things as they are, and according to what is just and right to be done. Nor can he be biased with any wrong affection, with any hopes or fears to draw him aside to any injustice, because he is all-sufficient and happy in himself, and infinitely beyond the reach of any temptation. And therefore, he must always be just, and his actions ever conformable to the eternal rules of righteousness and truth.

Again, if we consider God as an infinitely perfect being, who acts always in the most perfect manner, which is our natural notion of him, he must then be absolutely just. For it must be allowed, that to be just is a moral perfection, and becomes a reasonable being; and injustice is the greatest imperfection and depravation of any moral agent; it is to act inconsistently and absurdly, as a weak and malevolent being: and if so, it is impossible that he who is the author of all perfection and goodness, can ever act unjustly; he cannot act contrary to his own excellent nature, he cannot deny himself. So that from reason we may certainly conclude, that God must be just,
and

and there can be no unrighteousness with him. SERM.
VI.

And accordingly, we see that men in all ages, even in the heathen world, have had the same sentiments of him. They have always considered the supreme Being, the *Father of Gods and men*, as he was often stiled, to be perfectly just. They ever appealed unto him as inflexibly upright, and invoked him as the great Avenger of injustice and violence. However rude their notions might be of him with regard to some other things, they always accounted Justice as his most glorious attribute, by which he was qualified to be the Judge of the world. And even those of them who were the most ignorant, who imagined a plurality of gods, almost of equal power and dignity, believed them to be just, and to be revengers of wrong, and defenders of innocence.

But in the holy scriptures, this attribute of the Justice of God is declared in the fullest and strongest manner. In some places he is described, as impartially distributing Justice among his creatures; *Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?* says the patriarch Abraham, Gen. xviii. 25.

SERM. VI. And to the same purpose, says Moses to the Israelites, Deut. xxxii. 4. *He is a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he.* In other places of scripture, Justice is represented as essential to his nature, as if it was impossible for him to do injustice. Thus in Job xxxiv. 10. it is said, *far be it from God that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity.* And elsewhere, he is called *the righteous God.* Psalm vii. *The righteous Lord, a just God, and a Saviour,* Psalm lxxxix. 14. And that *Justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne,* Psalm lxxxix. And our blessed Saviour himself, calls him *the righteous Father,* John xvii. From these and many other passages, which might be tedious to mention, it is plain, that the scriptures clearly concur with our reason, to assert that God is perfectly just, in the same sense in which we understand Justice among men. And in them indeed, all the divine attributes are described in a manner agreeable to our most accurate reasoning.

The *Justice* of God in general, being then certain, let us in the

II. Place, consider how he exercises S E R M. VI.
this moral attribute among his creatures. }
Now to understand this, we ought to reflect, that God being our Creator, he hath an absolute property in us, and authority over us, and that all we have is the voluntary effect of his goodness. And therefore, he cannot act towards us, as if we were independent upon him; nor could we have any demand upon him for an equal distribution of his bounty. For as his dominion over us is absolute, we can have no claim to any thing, but what it is consistent with his wisdom and goodness to give. Nevertheless, as we are his reasonable creatures, and he hath given us laws for our conduct in life, he will act towards us according to our nature and circumstances. He will not arbitrarily destroy us, or make us miserable; nor will he so take from us all the benefit of our creation, that it would have been better for us never to have been. In this, the absolute dominion of God must have its limits, and must be determined by his Justice. So that the Justice of God to his creatures, consists in his acting toward them suitably to
H 4 their

S E R M. their nature, in not willingly making them
 VI. miserable, or requiring of them more
 than they have abilities to perform. He
 will treat them according to the circum-
 stances and powers which he has given
 them. Now this being considered, it is
 obvious, in the

1. Place, that in his acting towards
 us, he will have no respect of persons.
 All will be equally regarded by him. For
 as we are all the work of his hands, the
 greatest as well as the lowest, with the
 same moral dispositions, must be equally
 acceptable to him. There can be no plea
 for any favour before him, but what
 arises from the circumstances of our case.
 The Almighty cannot err in his judgment
 of us, through any weakness, nor is he
 to be flattered, or drawn to any dislike,
 by any arts that can be used. He, as it
 is expressed, in the book of Job xxxiv. 19.
*accepteth not the persons of princes, nor re-
 gardeth the rich more than the poor.*

2. He will act in justice with us, ac-
 cording to our good or evil, as the truth
 of our moral character requires. This is
 the only distinction that God will make
 in his judgment of us. For as he made
 us reasonable creatures, with the power
 of

of chusing and acting, and hath given us S E R M.
laws for our conduct, he may justly call VI.
us to an account, and treat us according
to our different behaviour. It will be just
with him to render to every man accord-
ing to his works. This is the great law
of heaven, that men shall be justified or
condemned by their moral conduct. To
use the words of the prophet Ezekiel, the
*righteousness of the righteous shall be upon
him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall
be upon him.* He who is infinitely pure
and holy, who loves righteousness and
hates sin, cannot but regard the just and
innocent, and abhor the vicious and
wicked. Therefore, to *them who by pa-
tient continuance in well doing seek for glory
and honour, he will give eternal life; but
to them that are disobedient, and obey not the
truth, indignation and wrath.*

3. But more particularly, as God sees
and knows all things in the most perfect
manner, he will make an exact distribu-
tion according to the circumstances of
every case. He will observe a just pro-
portion of reward and punishment, ac-
cording to the various degrees of our
moral conduct. For as he has given us
different powers, and placed us in diffe-
rent

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VI.

rent circumstances, with greater or fewer advantages, so more or less will be required of us. *The servant that knew not his Lord's will, and did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes; but he that knew his will and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.* And it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, that is, for sinners that have less knowledge, and fewer opportunities, than for those who have the light of the gospel, with all its advantages. The truth of the circumstances will be considered, and all reasonable allowances made. He who had ten talents bestowed upon him, will be called to an account for his improvement of every one of them; but he who had only one, will be accountable for that alone. Those who are placed in the highest stations, and have great opportunities of improvement and doing good in the world, will be judged according to what it was in their power to have done; and their wilful abuse of it will be severely chastised. And on the other hand, the goodness of heart, the desires and inclinations of those who had fewer opportunities, and less ability, will be considered and justly re-

rewarded. As they had it in their hearts S E R M.
to do good, so he who is the searcher of VI.
the heart, will treat them accordingly.

Let us now in the

III. Place, consider briefly, some objections that may be made to the Justice of God, from the present appearance of things. And in the first place, there is that common objection, which has been made in all ages, namely, the unequal distribution of things in this world; that the wicked and the vilest of men often prosper and enjoy the greatest advantages, while the best of men, those who fear God and endeavour to serve him, labour under many difficulties, and are even sometimes in a miserable situation. Now the solution of this is easy, if we extend our views to another existence. For if there is a life to come, all the inequalities observed here, may there be adjusted; virtue and goodness may have a full reward, and vice and wickedness be severely punished. The joy and success of wicked men here, and all their vicious pleasures, may be fully balanced by their anguish and misery hereafter. And on the other hand, all the troubles and difficulties of
good

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good men, may be recompensed with perfect happiness, glory, and honour for ever. And if this should be the event, as it certainly will, then the justice of God will be glorified, and the course of his providence in this world abundantly justified. And the whole assemblage of rational beings may then say, *Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.*

But it may in the next place be objected, that besides this inequality with regard to the virtuous and the vicious, there is likewise a great inequality of the divine dispensations, in placing men before there can be any trial of them, in such situations as have great influence upon their moral conduct. Men are brought into the world in various circumstances; some in poverty, and others in affluence; some with weak and unhappy, and others with healthy and vigorous constitutions and habits of body; some with weak minds, and others with acute and strong reasoning powers; and withal, some are born of good and virtuous parents, and have the happiness of a good education, while others, come of those who are wretched and vicious. Now in all this, the Justice of God may be easily

easily vindicated, by our considering his SERM.
VI. rightful power over us as our Creator.

He may make his creatures in what manner he pleases, and communicate to them different degrees of ability. He may give to some of them greater faculties, and place them in more advantageous circumstances, without any injustice to others; and to use the words of our Saviour, Matt. xx. 15. *he may do what he will with his own.* It seems rather to be reasonable, that he should diversify the effects of his power, wisdom, and goodness, in placing men in different orders, and in a variety of situations. But though he may thus communicate opportunities to them, in infinitely various degrees, to compleat the beauty and harmony of the moral system, he certainly intended something of happiness for all his rational creatures, just as we see infinite variety and different degrees of perfection in the material world. He has made all of them in such manner, that if they will exert their powers, there is a probability of their being in some degree happy. And therefore, though God has made a great inequality in the condition and circumstances of men, he acts with perfect Justice

SERM. VI. Justice towards them, in giving them, for wise reasons unknown to us, their different degrees of happiness.

In the last place, it may be more particularly objected, that there is a great inequality in the spiritual advantages which men have, and which concern their eternal salvation. Thus in the present state of the world, we see that a great part of it lies in ignorance and idolatry, while other parts have the clear and happy light of the gospel. And in former ages, the ancient Jews had the peculiar advantages of a revelation, while the far greatest part of mankind in the heathen nations, was involved in barbarity and darkness. And here the Justice of God may also be vindicated, by our supposing that he has given to all men sufficient reasonable powers, by which they may discover his being and attributes, and their duty to him, with the probability of a life to come. And if they so far improve their minds, and endeavour to find out the will of God, as their circumstances will allow, there is no doubt but they will enjoy a proportionable degree of happiness. So that though God has not given them all the
advan-

advantages that are necessary to their perfection, he has yet given them reason enough to endeavour after improvement, and for their use of that, they will be justly accountable. Since therefore, some means are given to all, the Justice of God is sufficiently vindicated, though all have not the superior light of revelation. For he may make his rational creatures, in what manner he pleases, instances of happiness here, and glory hereafter.

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From the whole, we may draw the following practical inferences. In the

1. Place then, the Justice of God is a glorious pattern for us to imitate. If God, the supreme and omnipotent being, is just in all his dealings with his creatures, and treats them according to their different circumstances, making all reasonable allowances for them; this ought to teach us in our low situation to be just to our fellow-creatures, to regard their reasonable claims upon us, and not to use our little power, in an arbitrary and tyrannical manner over them. It ought to excite us to act with truth and honesty, not to injure the happiness of any, and to abstain from all little arts of fraud and violence.

SERM. VI. violence. It ought to shew us, that in-justice and oppression, are absurd and unreasonable, and contrary to the benevolent and happy constitution of things established by our righteous Creator. If we thus follow the divine pattern of righteousness, we shall, in some degree, in our low capacity, be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. And how amiable must be the character of that person who endeavours to follow the eternal rules of Justice and truth, by which the great Sovereign of the universe himself is ever determined in all his operations.

2. The Justice of God is a sure ground of comfort to good men. *God is not unrighteous*, to use the words of the apostle, *that he should forget their works and labour, that proceedeth of love*. He cannot but make a distinction between them and the vicious; for he must consider them as objects justly worthy of his favour and protection; and to neglect them would be to deny himself, and to disregard the difference between good and evil: therefore, such men may rely upon the Justice of God, that, whatever be the present appearance of things; whatever troubles
and

infirmities they may now labour under, S E R M.
their happiness in the final event shall be VI.
secured. All the inexplicable dispensations of providence, that perplex them now, shall then be unravelled to their joy and satisfaction; and there shall be a just distribution of happiness and glory to them, by the righteous Lord, who *loveth the righteous, and whose countenance doth behold the upright.*

In the last place, the Justice of God ought to be matter of terror to the vicious and wicked. For if God is just, how can they expect that their wickedness shall be unpunished? Shall not he render to them according to their works, and bring upon them their own iniquity? Shall not their unjust and oppressive deeds be remembered by him, which they did in defiance of him, and in contempt of his laws and government? Will it not be just for him to bring upon them destruction and misery? And then, alas! who can deliver them from his almighty arm? Where will the workers of iniquity hide themselves from his vengeance? They shall be reserved as unhappy instances of his Justice, in that place *where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.*

SERM. *teeth.* So shall the Justice of God be
VI. then fully vindicated, in suffering them
to triumph and prosper a little in this
state of things: and to everlasting ages it
shall be proclaimed, *Just and true are thy*
ways, thou King of saints!

S E R M O N VII.

The Omnipresence of God.

J E R E M I A H XXIII. 24.

*Can any man hide himself in secret places,
that I shall not see him? saith the Lord:
do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the
Lord.*

OF all the attributes of the Deity, S E R M.
VII.
his immensity, or being every
where, seems most nearly to concern us: for though he were infinitely powerful, wise, and good, yet if we could conceive him not to be always with us, those properties would be of much less consequence to us, because it is possible, we might not feel their effects. But to think of him as ever existent with us, in whatever situation and circumstances we may be, gives us the most awful view of his nature, and represents our moral behaviour as of infinite importance; since we must ever be observed by him, to whom all things are continually open.

SERM.

VII.

considering their connexion with what goes before, we hear the prophet asserting, that God is every where present; that there is no place, how retired and secret soever, where he is not; no part of space where he does not exist; and that it is in vain for men to conceal themselves, or their actions, from his all-seeing eye. *Can any man bide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him? saith the Lord: do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord.*

In discoursing on this subject, I shall

I. Endeavour to represent to you, the truth of this attribute of God, his immensity, or his being every where present.

II. I shall mention some general consequences of this doctrine. And

Lastly, make some practical uses of it.

I. Then I am to represent to you, the truth of this perfection of God, his being every where present.

Before the light of the gospel shone upon the world, the heathens had but very dark and imperfect notions of this attribute. They seem to have had no
 appre-

apprehension of God, as an infinitely perfect being, who existed every where. SERM.
VII.

For as they imagined a plurality of Gods, so they thought each of them to be confined within the limits of his proper sovereignty and power. They fancied them to be set over particular countries and regions, and to be their protectors and defenders; or to have dominion in particular things. Some they thought to rule over the sea; others in the air, and fire; some over woods and forests; others over the hills, and valleys, and rivers, &c. But no one nation except the Jews, had any notion of the unity of God, and his being every where present. Some indeed, of the more rational and philosophic among men, apprehended, that there was one God supreme over all the rest, and that he was unlimited with regard to his presence and power; but these were so very few, that they had no influence to remove the prevailing ignorance.

But in the revelation which we have now, which has *brought life and immortality to light*, we are taught in the clearest manner, what we are to believe concerning this perfection of God. For in the scriptures, there is frequent men-

SERM. tion made of it in the strongest terms.

VII.

I shall only repeat some passages, that are most obvious. In the cxxxixth Psalm, the Psalmist expresses his sentiments of it in very affecting language. *O Lord, says he, thou knowest my down-sitting, and mine up-rising; whither shall I go from thy spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend into heaven thou art there, if I make my bed in hell thou art there also; if I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me. If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me, yea the darkness hideth not from thee.* In like manner it is said in the book of Job, xxxiv. 21. *His eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings; there is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.* So also Solomon expresseth himself, 1 Kings viii. 27. *But will God indeed dwell with men upon earth? behold, the heaven, and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee.* And St. Paul, Acts xvii. says of God, *that he is not far from every one of us; for in him we live, move, and have our being.*

And

And as the scriptures are thus clear SERM.
VII.
concerning this divine attribute, so our reason, when calmly consulted, teaches us the same thing. And indeed, the declarations of the gospel have in general, set men upon enquiring farther into religion by their reason, than otherwise, perhaps, they would ever have done. Now from reason we may argue thus.

If we allow, that all things whatsoever we observe in the universe, are the effects of God's power, and that they were created by him, it is plain, that he must have been present with the things when they were made; for where his power was exerted, there he must be. For no power of a being can act, in a natural way, where the being itself does not exist. Now we see, that these works of God, are dispersed through boundless space, in great variety, and some of them to an incomprehensible distance from others, though placed in an exact order or proportion; so that there is a general design carried on in all the parts of the universe, how far soever removed from one another, in the same moment of time. Particularly in the heaven above, we observe an infinite number of glorious bodies,

S E R M.
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placed at immense distances from one another, performing their motions with the greatest exactness and harmony, and having their distances, magnitudes, and figures, fitted in the justest proportion. Now the Creator, when he made them, must have been present with each of them, to form and poise them, and set them in motion, with such degree of movement, as fitted the orbs they were intended to describe. For how could he act and form things, where he was not? He must have been present at their immense distances, when he stationed those bodies; neither could they continue in that state any time, without his presence and assistance.—He must still be always present with each of them to preserve their motions, and to prevent them from ruin and confusion. A very superficial view of the works of nature, will shew us an infinite power, exerted at all times, and in all places of the Universe. There is an infinity of new animals and vegetables constantly produced, with an amazing subtilty of parts, and with all the marks of wisdom and power impressed upon them; and the operations of nature are incessantly going on, in every corner;

corner ; while some things are dying and dissolved, others are rising into being and new formed. And as all things, we observe, are in a continual flux, ever altering their state, some passing from a more gross and imperfect to a more perfect ; and others, on the contrary, tending to a dissolution and vanishing ; and all this without any power or activity of the things themselves ; and still in such manner, that the beauty and order of the whole is preserved, and the general plan or design carried on : all this, I say, shews evidently, that the same power which first brought things into being, is still employed at all times, in every corner of the universe ; for it requires the same degree of power, constantly to maintain the succession of such an infinity of fluctuating things, which it did in the beginning to make them. For how can all those infinitely various operations be carried on at the same time, unless the Divine Architect is every where present to direct and enliven them ? And this is more particularly visible, when we consider how animal life is preserved in a vast number of creatures, by a wonderful circulation of fluids and juices in
their

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their bodies, which seem every moment to depend upon an invisible mover, and are all of them fitted to the particular circumstances of their being; all this can never be understood, unless we suppose that the Divine power is every where present with them. For how is it possible, that those fluids can be kept warm, and circulate in the bodies of animals, without this power continually exerting itself in them? We see how any other motion excited by art in such fluids, quickly ceases. And therefore, there appears plainly a Divine power continually present and acting in every animal. And, as there is such an infinite number of various animals dispersed through the universe, this power must likewise be extended every where, and always with them. If then the same power which made things, be continually exerted in all places where there is being, God must exist wherever his power is, and be present with the things where it produces effects. And therefore, if God must be present with his works, he must exist in every part of space in the universe, as they are scattered through the whole with
an

an infinite variety; that is, he must be every where present. SERM.
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But farther, it is evident, that being every where present is the highest degree of perfection; because if it is a perfection to exist at all, and a greater to exist through longer periods of time, it must also be a perfection to exist in larger portions of space, and so on, till we arrive at the notion of a boundless being that is every where. Therefore, if God is not every where present, he cannot be infinitely perfect, but must only be a finite being, confined within certain limits, and his powers determined, which seems contrary to the natural notion of a first and necessary cause; and then we might also imagine another being more perfect and of superior attributes, which is a plain absurdity; for is it not absurd to imagine, the possibility of a being more perfect than the cause of all things?

It is true, it is difficult for us, from our weak and narrow notions, to imagine, how this can be an attribute of the Divine nature; but we see that it must be so, because it is impossible for his power to act where he is not, and because without this he could not be all-powerful

SERM. powerful and infinitely perfect. How-
VII. ever, we may conceive of it faintly in this manner. As we see that inferior creatures, of less perfect powers than ourselves, have a less sphere of activity, in which they act and exert their powers at a less distance, and can attend to fewer things than we; so we may imagine, that there may be other beings more perfect than us, which use their powers at a greater distance, and attend to more things in greater variety. And by enlarging our imagination, we may still conceive, that there may be incomparably more perfect beings than these, that can use their faculties at greater distances, and upon a greater variety of things, and so on; till by thus ascending in our thoughts, we may conceive a being infinitely perfect, whose powers are exerted every where, upon an infinite variety of things, through the immensity of space. And this is God, who by the necessity of his nature exists every where, and fills all things; or, as the scripture expresseth it, in *whom we live, move, and have our being.*

I might also mention, that some have endeavoured to illustrate the notion of
 God's

God's being every where present with his SERM.
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works, by the comparison of a soul that animates a body. Not that they supposed God to be the soul of the world, for that is too gross; but only, that as the soul gives life and motion to the body, and is sensible of whatever happens to it, so God acts upon his works, and perceives all occurrences among them.

I come now to the

II. Thing I proposed; to mention some general consequences of this doctrine of God's being every where present. And

1. We see plainly from hence, the unity of the Divine nature, and the absurdity of Polytheism. For if there could be more Gods than one, then each of these must be infinite, and every where present, or else each of them must exist within certain limits, and be confined to particular regions of the universe. Now in the first case, if there could be a plurality of infinite beings, then each of them must exist together in every part of space, and operate together in the various productions of nature; so that to every effect, there would be more than one infinite

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finite cause to produce it : and besides this, their natures must be so blended together, that there must be confusion ; for how is it possible, without confusion, to imagine different beings of the same kind, each of them having immensity, and filling all things. And we can no more conceive, how more beings than one, of the same kind, can have immensity, or be every where present, than that more bodies than one, can be in the one and the same place. But if in the other case, we could suppose each of them to be confined within certain limits and regions of the universe, and their powers restrained to some particular things, which was the notion of the heathens ; then these must be imperfect beings, of limited powers, separated from, and independent of one another, and each of them incapable of doing a variety of things ; and then there could be no infinitely perfect, supreme, and necessary cause of all things ; and consequently, there could be no proper object of supreme worship and adoration, because each of these, might occasionally, be unable to assist their votaries. So that God's being every where present, shews plainly the unity of the Deity ;

Deity; which is the foundation of all true and rational religion. SERM.
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2. From hence it is evident, that God must be also infinite in knowledge. For if he is every where present, if he exists in every part or portion of space, all things, and their properties, and circumstances must be known unto him, and he must see them distinctly, in whatever way they may be involved together. Nothing can be hidden from him or kept secret; all things must be within the reach of his view. And therefore, all the actions of all moral agents, however dispersed through the universe, must be perfectly known unto him; he must *know their down-sitting and up-rising, and understand their thoughts afar off.* The inmost and essential parts of their nature must be known unto him, and be continually before him. They cannot dissemble with him, nor conceal their most inward motions from him.

3. If God is every where present, we may see also, that his providence must extend to all, even the minutest things. For if he exists in every part of infinite space, what alteration, what movement can there be of any the least particle of matter,

SERM. VII. matter, that he does not perceive? what effect can be produced but by his permission? As he is intimately and essentially present with every thing, even the smallest incidents must be regarded by him, and under his care, and perhaps, made use of by him to bring about the greatest events. Nor can the multiplicity of objects embarrass him, and obstruct his attention to particulars; for it is plain, that if he is equally present with all things, he can equally attend to all. If in things that are within the reach of our own senses, we can often attend to a variety, and observe any considerable change in their arrangement and number at the same time, what shall we say of him, whose sensation (if I may so express it), is extended every where? Shall not he, whose faculties are absolutely perfect, and ever present with all things, perceive all their changes and various effects, without any labour or perplexity? If he is alike present with all things, the minutest as well as the greatest, must be observed equally by him; so that, as our Saviour expresseth it, *a Sparrow cannot fall to the ground without him, and even the very hairs of our head are all numbered.*

4. Hence

4. Hence also, from a just notion of S E R M.
this attribute of God, we may understand VII.
the meaning of a great variety of passages in the scriptures, which otherwise would be obscure. Thus, when bodily parts are attributed to God, the sense cannot be, that he who is every where has any parts, but only that the scripture represents his perfections, according to the language and apprehension of mankind. Thus, when the hand of God is said to perform any thing, the sense can only be, that the power of God effects it. So again, when eyes and ears are ascribed to him, the meaning is, that as certainly as men see and hear, so God perceives and knows, whatever is done; or when a mouth is ascribed to him, it is to be understood, that as men speak and express their sentiments, so God can and does communicate his will. In like manner, when God is said to be in heaven, or dwell in heaven, the sense is, that though God is every where present, yet in heaven, among angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect, he manifests his power and goodness in a more particular and glorious manner, and that there he gives brighter discoveries of himself.

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felf. To the same purpose, when God is said to be in his temple on earth, it is signified, that as by his appointment his worship was performed there, so he had a particular regard to the prayers and religious services of his people in that place. Not but that God will hear the prayers of the humble from whatever corner they come; but as he will have a just regard for his own institutions, our prayers and religious services will still be more acceptable to him, if they are performed, where he, for order and publick example, has appointed them.

In the last place, we may see from hence, that God is a proper object of adoration and praise. A being that cannot be every where, and that cannot discern the true sentiments and sincerity of the heart, must be a very improper object of religious worship. But as God is every where present, he can at all times and in every place be addressed; he cannot be ignorant of the various wants and necessities of them that call upon him. The true God of the universe, will always be distinguished from the deities and vanities of the heathens in this, that as they are of limited powers and capacities,

cities, and cannot help their votaries in particular circumstances; he on the contrary, exists every where, and will always be as the prophet Jeremiah, xxiii. *expresseth it, a God at hand and not afar off.*

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It remains now, that we apply what has been said to our practice. And

1. If this be true, that God is every where present, then we see that our behaviour, and the whole of our moral actions, must be of the greatest importance to us, as they are continually observed by him, who hath power to punish or reward, and one day will pass a righteous sentence upon us. It is given as a rule by some moralists, to excite to the practice of virtue, that we should suppose frequently with ourselves, that we are in the view of some persons remarkable for goodness, that we should reflect what they would think of our behaviour; and shall we not much more be persuaded to a reasonable and pious deportment, from this awful consideration, that we are constantly in the view of him who is higher than the highest? If we are struck with awe in the presence of men, who are eminent for their wisdom and superior character in life, shall we not have the

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most profound regard for the presence of him, who is the all-wise and almighty Creator, just and holy, and who has vice and wickedness in the greatest abhorrence? Let us therefore, endeavour at all times, to have it in our minds, that we are in the presence of him that made us, who hath given a law of action by which we are to be judged, and to which, if we conform ourselves, we shall be happy. Let us remember, when we are tempted to sin, in secret, and in retirement from all observation, *that the eyes of the Lord are upon the ways of man, and that he seeth all his goings*; and let us frequently examine, whether our conduct be pleasing to that almighty Being, in *whose hand our breath is, whose are all our ways, and who can destroy both body and soul in hell.*

2. From hence also, we see that good men have a sure ground of inward quiet and satisfaction. As God is ever present with them, he knows their integrity of life, he sees their secret behaviour, and all their good and charitable works; and he will not be unrighteous to forget them. To use the words of the prophet Malachi, *A book of remembrance will be written*

written before him, for them that feared S E R M.
the Lord, and thought on his name. But VII.

if good men are oppressed with calumny, and their virtue be called into question, and perhaps, their natural weakness magnified into crimes, nothing can afford greater comfort than this, that they have an impartial witness who knows their innocence, and who will one day openly acquit them. They need not value the peevish and ill-natured censures of the world; if their own hearts do not condemn them, they know that the all-seeing God will justify them.

3. From hence also, good men have just reason to trust in God, at all times and in all places. For if he is every where present, he is to be relied upon continually, *as a God at hand*. The best of friends may be at a distance, and there may be no help in them; but nothing can seclude us from our intercourse with God, who fills the immensity of space. If we are acceptable to him, and it is proper for our happiness, we may be assured of his protection in every situation, state, and circumstance.

In the last place, the consideration of God's being every where present, ought

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to be matter of terror to wicked and irreligious men. For as he is ever with them, and their wickedness cannot be concealed from him, they may justly fear, that the divine vengeance will overtake them. And where will the workers of iniquity hide themselves from his all-seeing eye? *Whither will they go from his spirit, or flee from his presence?* All nature is not able to screen them from his view, or deliver them from his almighty arm. *There is no darkness nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.*

S E R.

S E R M O N V I I I .

On Faith.

A C T S X V I . 3 I .

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

TH E S E words were spoken by S E R M .
V I I I .
St. Paul, in answer to a question of the utmost importance ; *What must I do to be saved?* He had been preaching at Philippi, a city in the Lower Asia, where he had been persecuted, as he usually was, and thrown into prison, with his companion Silas ; when lo ! after prayer, at midnight, the prison doors were in a miraculous manner opened. At which the jailor, being in great consternation, and seeing the immediate power of God giving testimony to the gospel, could no longer doubt of its divine original, and of the mission of the apostle to preach it. And then, reflecting on his own wretchedness, and the necessity of being a partaker of this sal-
K 4 vation

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vation that was offered, he with great earnestness asks the apostle, *What must I do to be saved?* To which he had for a full answer, the words of the text, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*

In which, we plainly see the condition upon which we are to expect Salvation, viz. *that we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.* And this, as it is of the utmost consequence to us to know it, is frequently inculcated to us in the New Testament. Thus our Saviour himself tells the Jews, John viii. 28. *If ye believe not that I am he (the Christ), ye shall die in your sins.* And again, John iii. 18. *He that believeth on him is not condemned, but he that believeth not, is condemned already, because he believeth not on the name of the only begotten Son of God.* And after his resurrection, in his last discourse with his disciples, he tells them, Mark xvi. 16. *He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.* So very plain it is, that the believing on Jesus Christ, is the condition of our salvation. Now this believing on him, implies a suitable knowledge of him;

him; that is, of his doctrine, and what he hath done, and the method of salvation through him. Not that the same degree of knowledge is required in all, but such only as is consistent with our capacities, our opportunities, and circumstances. And such knowledge is evidently necessary; for in general, believing supposes the knowledge of the things that are believed. And to believe implicitly, without knowing something of the nature of the thing, and what we believe about it, is indeed to believe nothing at all.

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In the following discourse, I shall endeavour

I. To consider in general, what it is to *believe*, and make some observations. And then

II. What it is to *believe in the Lord Jesus Christ*. I am

I. Then to consider, in general, what it is to *believe*, and make some observations. Now to believe any thing, is to assent to the truth of it, upon some proper proof or evidence. For all propositions that we believe to be true, we either

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ther see immediately to be so, or we are persuaded of their truth, upon some grounds or evidence; so that believing is, strictly speaking, *the judgment or determination of the mind, concerning the truth of any thing*. There are some things in the first place, we see clearly, and immediately to be true, without any intermediate proof or evidence; and these are the first principles of our knowledge, or maxims, by the means of which we see other things to be certainly true; and those truths so discovered by them, are the grounds or matter of science. And such truths as we deduce from the first principles, we in a manner see to be true, and we know them, so far as we can depend upon our faculties; and the evidence is so strong, that it cannot be resisted. In the second place, there are other things, for the truth of which there is some proof and evidence given, though the mind is not so affected by it, as to be fully convinced of their truth, without some remains of doubt; and these are matters of opinion: and they are said to be more or less probable, according as there appears more or less probability of their being true. Now
between

between these two kinds, there is a third sort of truths, of a moral and religious nature, of which the evidence is not so clear and determined as in the first case, but is much stronger, and more affecting than the second case, and which have such plain and persuasive proof, that the mind rests satisfied with their certainty. Their evidence is of a different nature from that of the first, though they are equally true and convincing; but it is of a superior kind, to that which supports any common opinions, as it leaves no doubt of their certainty. The being of God, and his attributes, and the obligations to virtue, and in short, all the truths of natural religion, are of this sort. The evidence or proof that is brought for them, though it is not so clear as that which is given in some sciences, yet it is so plain and affecting, that the mind is as fully persuaded, as of any thing whatsoever. Of the same kind are the truths of Revealed Religion; there is such evidence given for them, such a combination of circumstances, and such a variety of views, in which they may be considered as rational and worthy of God, that there is no doubt left to a serious

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rious and inquisitive mind. And the proof, upon the whole, is such, that it is sufficient to demand our assent, and determine us to action; for if we regard nothing as true which has not a demonstrable evidence, our knowledge would be very confined, and extend to a very few things indeed; and we should be ignorant of many truths, that greatly concern our happiness in this world; since the most important truths, have not always the strongest and clearest proofs of their certainty.

It is only with regard to these truths of Revealed Religion, or the gospel, that I now consider what it is to *believe*.

And here it is to be observed, that the Belief of these truths of the gospel in the ordinary way, is to be acquired in the same manner, as the belief of any other moral or natural truths whatever, by our reasoning, and by a serious enquiry. For as our reason is the light of the Lord within us, we are to be directed by that, as the grounds and means of all our knowledge. And so far is it from being true, that christianity is not founded on argument and reason, that on the contrary, in the scriptures, we are often called

called upon to examine and consider the great truths of religion, and the evidences for them; that we may be ready, as St. Peter expresseth it, *to give a reason of the hope that is in us*. And though the gospel chiefly depends upon the truth of some facts, we are to consider and reason upon the probability of them; and we are to reflect upon the various circumstances that concur to make them credible. Just as in common life, we determine concerning the truth of a fact, from the evidence given, and circumstances that attend it: and unless we thus weigh things, we cannot act as rational creatures. But then, we are not to make greater demands for our satisfaction, than on other important occasions we should require; for we must be content with what the nature of things will afford, and we are not to expect sensible and demonstrative proof, when a moral certainty is sufficient. And therefore, when we are called to *believe the gospel*, and to *believe in our Lord Jesus Christ*, the meaning can only be, that we are required to assent to the truths of the gospel, and the claim of our Saviour, after a reasonable and just enquiry. And in like man-

SERM. ner, when we are required to believe any
VIII. particular doctrines, said to be delivered
in the gospel, we are to search the scriptures, and examine the passages brought to confirm them, by just criticism and rational deduction.

It is true, we read in the New Testament of some persons being converted, and believing the gospel almost in a moment, upon some of the apostles preaching unto them; so that one would think, they had no time to consider and reason about it. But then it is to be remembered, that the preaching of the gospel, was usually accompanied with some miracles, or wonderful works, that shewed the power of God, giving testimony to the truth of what they affirmed. So that there could not be much reasoning, when miraculous facts were plain to their senses, which like experiments confirmed the whole of what was declared. They could not deny what they saw with their eyes, nor could they think, that God would ever give his concurrence to a falshood, or suffer them to be deceived invincibly, with an imposture in a matter of such consequence. And therefore, in such cases men must be struck at once, with
a strong

a strong conviction of the truth of the SERM. VIII. gospel. And this we see, was the case of the jailor, in Chap. xvi. where the text is. He saw, that upon the praying of St. Paul and his companion, the prison was shaken, and all the doors were opened, and therefore he was convinced that God favoured their cause, and that the gospel preached was true; upon which he addresses himself to them, *what must I do to be saved?* But now since those miraculous powers are ceased, and the preachers of the gospel only deliver and reason upon what they find in the scriptures, men are not ordinarily convinced in such a sudden and instantaneous manner. They must consider the strength of the testimony given, that such wonderful works were actually performed, which now they have not opportunity to see. They must examine the goodness and reasonableness of the doctrines they are brought to confirm, whether they are worthy of God; and they must reflect upon these prophecies that are given in the scriptures, as standing miracles in all ages. And if they seriously do this, there is no doubt but that they will be believers. They are to consider,
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and reason, and deliberate upon the truth of the gospel, and then to embrace it upon rational conviction. Not but that men, even since the ceasing of miracles, may almost all at once, be suddenly brought to the belief of the gospel, and be converted. Some truths of religion may be represented in such a light, that they may strike the mind, as it were in a moment, and make the whole appear to be credible. The mind itself too may at sometimes be better disposed to receive truth, than at others. Some awful events of providence, may make men immediately become religious, and submit to the gospel. And above all, God may by some supernatural influence or power, act upon the souls of men. Some divine light may so dart itself in upon them, and represent things in such a view, that they cannot hesitate, but readily become believers, without long reasoning and enquiry.

But here it may be said, how are the generality of mankind to receive the gospel revelation, and believe it; for they cannot reason abstractly about it, nor will their circumstances allow them to make long enquiries. To which it may be

be answered, that every man is to do SERM.
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the best he can, in a matter of such consequence, which thus concerns the happiness of his soul; and the same degree of knowledge and reason is not expected of all men. They are to do in this, what all do in other cases of importance; they are to conduct themselves as far as they can by their own reason, and then, when they are at a loss, they are to apply to others of more knowledge and skill, and upon whose integrity they can depend. And besides this, it may be added, that all men, in whatever condition, and of how low understanding soever, may go a great way of themselves, toward being satisfied of the truth of religion. They must see from the light of nature, if they will attend to it, the grand truths of natural religion, the being and perfections of God; that he must be of a moral character, and by his providence govern the things of this world, and that he must be the rewarder of them that diligently seek him. And then if they can only read the scriptures, they will see many things there agreeable to their natural notions of God, and highly worthy of him; they will find such

SERM. an account of the goodness and love of
VIII. God in the redemption of mankind, and
so many things suitable to their wants
and circumstances, that they must acknowledge, there are marks and proofs in the book itself of its divine original. The usefulness of the truths therein delivered, the reasonableness of them, their moral purity, and their tendency to make mankind happy, will easily satisfy a serious enquirer, that this book must have come from God, and that it cannot be the imposture of men, whose work generally betrays their own weakness, their wickedness, and corruption. And if they can see these things, and understand so far, they may be fully persuaded of the truth of our holy religion, though they cannot enter into all the arguments that are usually brought for the conviction of infidels. And I may say further, that the daily practice of such a person in the exercise of religion and devotion, will continually confirm him in this belief, and give him such an inward quietness and pleasure in his mind, that he will be led to conclude with the apostle, that *he who believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself*, John v. 10. And that the
Spirit

Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, SERM.
that we are the children of God, Rom. viii. 6. VIII.

But perhaps, it may be said by some, that it is not in our own power to *believe*; for according to the view of the evidence, or probability of things that the mind considers, it judges and determines; and it seems entirely passive, and only apprehends things as they appear to it, so that we cannot believe what we would; and therefore, say they, how can the apostle exhort us *to believe*? To this we may answer, that it is indeed true, that it is not in our power to believe what we will; but then it is also true, that it is in our own power and option whether we will use the means to be convinced of the truth, and believe. No man can believe the most certain fact in history, without considering the proofs and circumstances that render it probable; but he may choose whether he will turn his thoughts toward it, and consider the proofs that are given or not, and therefore he may keep himself from believing any thing about it, whether it be true or false. In like manner, no one can believe any proposition delivered in any science, without attending to, and examining the

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proof that is given, and if he will not, he cannot be persuaded of it, however certain it be. If then, men may keep themselves from believing, by not using the means to bring them to a belief of the truth, they may be justly exhorted to *believe*; seeing it depends upon themselves, whether they will attend to any reasoning or evidences given, or not. And therefore, very properly does the apostle in the text, exhort the keeper of the prison, to *believe in the Lord Jesus Christ*; because it is in our own power to consider the evidences of his divine mission, or to neglect doing it. And whoever does consider, shall no doubt, find sufficient grounds to believe. And I think it may justly be said, that no man who will forsake his vices, or is not under any prejudice by them, who will impartially and seriously examine the proofs of our holy religion, can ever fail to be a believer. For the evidences are strong and affecting, and by which men of the greatest genius and character in all ages, since the days of our Saviour, have been fully convinced; and perhaps, few have ever rejected it, who

who have not been conspicuously and confessedly vicious.

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And thus having explained in general, what it is to believe, I come now to the

II. Thing proposed; to consider particularly, what it is *to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ*. Divines have usually divided believing, or faith, into four kinds, viz. *an historical belief or faith, a temporary faith, a faith of miracles, and a saving faith*; but I think this division is not accurate. By historical faith is meant the belief of the whole Revelation of God, in the same manner as any common historical fact, without its producing any proper or practical effect on the mind. A temporary faith is, when persons believe for a time, and afterwards apostatize, and fall into infidelity. And the faith of miracles is such a belief as the prophets and apostles had, when they performed the miracles that are recorded of them; which being only a particular gift to these sacred persons, it cannot concern us now. And lastly, a saving faith is that sincere belief of the gospel, or *in our Lord Jesus Christ*, which is effectual to salvation. Now it is evi-

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dent, that the first two, an historical and temporary faith, are only lower degrees of a saving faith, and not different in their kind. And therefore I shall take no farther notice of them, but go on to describe particularly, what a saving faith is, or what it is *to believe sincerely in our Lord Jesus Christ.* And

1. In general it is to believe, that he is the Saviour of the world; that he was sent by God to give a revelation of his will to mankind; that the gospel history of the many wonderful works done by him is true; and that he is *the Christ* foretold by the prophets under the Old Testament, *that was for to come.* And this is what we have often declared to us in the New Testament, and illustrated in the examples of believers. Thus the Samaritans declare their faith, John xii. *Now we believe—that this indeed is the Christ, the Saviour of the world.* And to the same purpose do the disciples say, *we believe that thou camest forth from God.* And it is to be observed, that to believe thus in general concerning our Saviour and his gospel, is often declared to be sufficient for salvation, and to give a right unto baptism. Thus we read, that

that Philip baptized the eunuch, on his saying, *I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.* And of the three thousand converted by St. Peter, that they *were baptized the same day* he preached unto them; when they had not yet time to be instructed in many particulars, and could only declare their faith in general. Not but that a more particular and more perfect belief is required, when circumstances and opportunity will allow of it; but this in many cases, is sufficient to give a right to the denomination of christians, and to all the promises of the gospel. And indeed, such a general belief necessarily includes all the other articles of the christian faith. For if we believe, that Jesus is the Saviour of the world, sent by God to give a Revelation of his will, this plainly implies, that all the doctrine he and his apostles taught after him, came from God; which comprehends the whole faith of the gospel.

2. But more particularly, *to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ*, signifies not only to give an assent to the truth of his divine mission, but also to trust in him, to hope in him, and to rest upon him for our salvation. A bare speculative belief of

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the truth of the gospel, is not enough to form the character of a serious christian; the heart, and the affections of the soul must also be engaged to his Lord and Redeemer. For the believer, from his view of things in the gospel, from the consideration of what our Saviour has done, will consider himself as united to him by the strongest relation. All his hopes, and desires, and confidence, will center in him, as fully sufficient for his happiness. He will only expect salvation through him, and by the means he proposes. And hence, in the New Testament, we find the apostles expressing themselves in the most affectionate manner towards him. Thus St. Paul in his epistle to the Romans, viii. 35. says, *what shall separate us from the love of Christ?* And again, says he, *the love of Christ constraineth us.* And in his epistle to Timothy, i. 1. he calls him *our hope.* And in the epistle to the Colossians, iii. 4. he styles him *our life.* And to the same purpose, St. Peter, 1 ep. ii. says, *to you that believe he is precious,* with many other such affectionate expressions. The true believer's faith, as the apostle expresses it, *worketh by love.* And indeed how can it else be,

be, when he considers him as the foundation of all his happiness, who saves him from eternal death and misery, and who purchases to him by his blood, immortality, and glory for ever? Again,

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3. *To believe in Jesus Christ*, is to have such a conviction of the truth of his gospel, as to be determined to endeavour to form our life and practice according to his doctrine and commandments. This is true and genuine faith, which is known by its fruits. *Do men gather grapes of thorns, says our Saviour, or figs of thistles?* To pretend to believe in Christ, and not to endeavour to put in practice the precepts of the gospel, is a manifest contradiction. Such a belief that makes no amendment in our life, is useless to the purpose of our Salvation. *Faith if it hath not works is dead, being alone, says St. James—What doth it profit, though a man saith, he hath faith, and have not works, can faith save him?* Not that we are to conclude, that he who fails sometimes, or in any one instance of his duty, is not therefore to be accounted a believer. For then alas! who could be accounted a believer in this imperfect state, when men are so often drawn aside by the pleasures

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fures and deceits of the world, or by their own weakness and instability? Sin and infirmity will always appear in the most perfect characters, so long as we are here. But this we may justly say of the serious believer, that though he is not spotless and free from all sinful failures, yet the general method and course of his life is conformable to the doctrine and precepts of the gospel. He will never indulge himself in any known sin. He will always endeavour to guard himself against any known deviation from religion and virtue. And when at any time he unfortunately falls into sin, through heedlessness, surprise, and the allurements of the world, he will endeavour instantly to recover himself, by repentance, and by a serious application to the grace and merits of the *Mediator between God and man, the Lord Jesus Christ*, in whom he believes, and whom he knows to be set forth to be a *propitiation for his sins*.

And thus I have endeavoured to represent to you, what it is to *believe in Jesus Christ*; and without such a belief in him, we can have no claim to salvation. This is the plain condition upon which we are
to

to be saved, and it is highly reasonable. SERM.
VIII.
For if the Son of God came to redeem mankind, and performed so many wonderful works for their conviction, it must be necessary, that they should assent to the truths he delivered, and apply them; or else, to what purpose did he come, if it was of no importance to believe on him, and receive his gospel? The nature of the thing, seems to require that something should be done on our part, to make us fit to receive the benefits of such a salvation; for it cannot be imagined, that it should be accomplished without any condition, to determine upon whom such an inestimable favour should be conferred. But yet we are by no means to conclude from hence, that there are no cases to be excepted, in which God will grant his salvation, without an express and actual believing in Jesus Christ. For we know there are some circumstances, in which a merciful and good God will have compassion, without any faith in the gospel. Thus there can be no doubt, but that upon infants, or those of immature age, dying in that state, before they come to the use of their reason, God will in his goodness have mercy.
And

SERM. And likewise, those in the heathen world,
VIII. who have never heard of the name of Christ, and yet endeavour to do what they can to serve and please God, according to the light of nature, and the opportunities they have, we may justly think of them, that they shall be accepted and saved. For though we ought not to be too positive concerning the will of God, in things which he has not expressly revealed, as his ways are often incomprehensible to us, yet in those instances I have mentioned, if we can at all be sure of the goodness of God, I think it is plain, that he will be merciful. For he never will require more than he has given men power to perform; nor will he ever make any of his creatures miserable, but when by their own wilful misconduct and abuse of his goodness, they make themselves so. And in other cases, when men have been educated in opposition to the truth, when they have been taught to reject the gospel of Christ, as in the Mahometan countries, we may likewise hope of them, that God, the merciful Father of the universe, will make all reasonable allowances for their prejudices and their circumstances.

cumstances. But as to those who have the gospel declared unto them, and have the word of God put into their hands, and have opportunities to enquire into the truth, if *they* will not believe, but scornfully reject the christian revelation, as to them I say, we have but little hope, they must be left to that great Judge, who knows the secret springs of their infidelity ; *and shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?* One thing is certain, that in the New Testament, damnation is threatened to them ; and this ought to be an awful alarm, which those who reject the gospel should thoroughly consider, lest by their obstinate behaviour they forfeit their everlasting happiness.

From what has been said, we may now make the following reflections.

1. From hence we may see the character of a true and rational believer, viz. That having considered the evidences that are given for the truth of the gospel, as far as he is able, and according to his opportunities, he believes in Jesus Christ, as the Saviour of the world, who came down from heaven to give a revelation of the divine will to mankind, and in consequence of this he trusts in him, and

SERM. and relies upon him for salvation; and
 VIII. he endeavours to form his life, his practice, and the inward disposition of his soul, according to the precepts of the gospel. This is the true and serious believer, to whom are made all the promises of life and salvation, immortality and glory for ever. Such a one has all assurances given him, that he shall be happy after this frail and imperfect life, whatever be his present condition and circumstances. And therefore, let him *lift up his head and rejoice*, as our Saviour expresses it, for *the day of his redemption draweth nigh*.

2. From hence also, every man may examine himself, whether he be in a state of salvation, and whether he has any claim to the promises of the gospel. For the enquiry is very short and easy. Can he say from his heart, that he is a serious believer of the gospel revelation, and that he endeavours, as far as human frailty will allow, to form his life and conversation according to the dictates of it, without allowing himself in any known sin, or neglect of his duty. If so, then he may take comfort to himself, and be assured of his happiness. Let him lay
 aside

afide all his doubts and misgivings ; for his infirmities, that he is conscious of and often laments, will never condemn him before a merciful God, who has promised his acceptance through a mediator. But if he cannot say, that he seriously believes the gospel, nor that he endeavours to conform his heart and life to its precepts, such a one has no part nor lot in the redemption purchased by Jesus Christ ; he runs the hazard of being condemned at the last day, and of having a portion assigned him among the unbelievers.

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demned at the last day, and of having a
portion assigned him among the un-
believers.

S E R M O N IX.

The Conversation that becometh
the Gospel.

PHILIPPIANS I. 27.

*Only let your conversation be as becometh the
gospel of Christ.*

THOUGH experience shews that S E R M.
IX. the bulk of christians are corrupt and degenerate, and that no means used to reform them are in general effectual; yet it is confessedly true, that the doctrines and precepts of the gospel are pure and rational, and well fitted to recover mankind to that degree of perfection which they are capable of; and that if they would conduct themselves agreeable to what it prescribes, their practice would be unblameable, and as perfect as their nature will allow. And therefore, whatever be the practice of believers, the scheme of the gospel will always be vindicated, and the blame of their conduct will fall upon themselves.

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Our

S E R M. IX. Our holy religion gives no encouragement to the wickedness of its professors, but justly and severely condemns it; and it requires nothing more for the vindication of its reasonableness and purity, and to place it in an amiable light, than the suitable practice of Christians; that is, their doing what the apostle exhorts to do in the text, only to *let their conversation be as becometh the gospel of Christ.*

In the former part of this epistle, which was written while the apostle was prisoner at Rome for the sake of the gospel, he expresses his thankfulness and joy on account of the faith of the Philippians: and then he tells them, that he only wished to continue in life for their improvement, and that their rejoicing might be more abundant in Christ; that whether he were present or absent from them, he might have the comfort to hear of their good behaviour; for this only he desired of them, and this was only expected of them from their profession, that they would let their *conversation be as becometh the gospel of Christ.*

The Greek word which is here translated, *let your conversation*, signifies strictly, the behaving as citizens, who live according

according to their laws and constitutions; S E R M.
IX.
and then the words have a greater emphasis than can be well expressed in our language; as if the apostle had said, behave yourselves as becometh citizens of the heavenly kingdom, promised you by the gospel, of which the laws and institutions are holy, rational, and worthy of God. The expression *as becometh the gospel of Christ*, has something in it very strong and affecting, as if he had said, worthily, suitably, and consistently with the holy doctrine and precepts delivered in the gospel; that as the scheme of that is just and pure, so they ought to be innocent and virtuous. The words likewise contain a just insinuation, that christians do not always behave themselves *as becometh the gospel*; and that their lives are frequently inconsistent with the character and genius of the religion of Jesus.

In the following discourse, I shall

- I. Endeavour to describe to you from the nature of the gospel, what that conversation is which becomes it;
And then

SERM.
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II. Propose some means that may help
us to have our *conversation as becometh the
gospel.* I am

I. Then to describe from the nature of the gospel, the conversation that becomes it. And

1. As the gospel gives us the most sublime and awful account of God and his attributes, our conversation ought in some degree, to be suitable to this. As we have a more clear and determinate account of God and his perfections, than we could have from the dictates of reason, our obligations, as Christians, to holiness and virtue are proportionably strong. For obscure and doubtful notions of God, can never excite men to virtue so effectually, as when they are clear and certain. And in proportion, as men have just and reasonable sentiments of him, so their practice will be more or less pure and upright. Now in the gospel, we have a more clear, rational, and comfortable account of God, than in all the learned writings of the heathens. He is represented to us as the most perfect being, infinitely wise, powerful, just, and good; it is said, he governs

governs all things in heaven and earth, S E R M. IX.
and is ever present with us in our most
secret retirements; which is an amiable
and rational character of him. And in
consequence of this our practice, as
christians, ought to be more pure and
perfect; we ought in all our actions to
be ever mindful of him; to behave our-
selves as in his sight, and to set his moral
attributes before us, as the pattern of
our conduct. If he is just and good,
we ought to endeavour also to be so in
our little capacity; not only by giving
to every one what they can strictly de-
mand of us, but by being benevolent and
compassionate, promoting as much as
we are able, the happiness of all around
us, as he, the great Creator, is good and
compassionate to all. If he governs the
world in wisdom and justice, then, though
we cannot see the reason of his acting in
many particulars, we ought quietly to
submit to the determinations of his pro-
vidence; and even when they affect us
in a surprising and awful manner, we
ought calmly to resign ourselves to his
will, and say, thy will be done. Again,
if he is every where present with us, and
the observer of all our ways, this ought

SERM. to have a strong influence upon our
 IX. minds, to deter us from evil, and to excite us to a reasonable and worthy behaviour. If he sees into the recesses of our souls, and knows our inmost thoughts afar off, and nothing can be hid from him, this ought to guard us from vicious thoughts, to correct our wandering and irregular desires, and keep the motions of our hearts within the bounds of our duty. And in short, the reflection on God, as the most amiable and perfect being, such as he is described to us in the gospel, ought to excite us to act in a similar and suitable manner.

2. As the gospel teaches us the most sublime and amiable doctrines concerning our eternal salvation, so our conduct in life ought to be consistent with them, and suitable to our belief. For how absurd is it to pretend to believe the doctrines of our holy religion, while our conversation is a manifest violation of our faith? In the scriptures we have the discovery of many truths, that nearly concern our everlasting happiness; together with a long and affecting account of the methods of providence in the first ages of the world; how good men are
 the

the objects of God's love and compassion, and wicked men are exposed to his wrath and vengeance; and all this illustrated with many remarkable examples. Now if we seriously regard and believe such things, our conversation and deportment ought to be similar to our faith. More particularly, if it is represented to us, that when we were lost to the purposes of our creation by sin, we were redeemed and bought with a price, even with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish; we seem then to be appropriated to the service of God, *and redeemed, as St. Peter says, from our vain conversation; and therefore we ought to glorify God in our bodies and spirits, which are his.* But on the contrary, to be loose and unguarded in our conversation, and to be slaves to our passions and appetites, is inconsistent with any notion of our redemption, and manifestly shews, either that we do not believe, or do not sufficiently attend to the obligations we are under, in consequence of our believing. If again, the gospel declares plainly the terms of our acceptance with God, and represents sin as hateful to him, as well as unreasonable in itself, and that it will

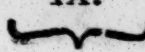
S E R M.
IX.

SERM. bring us to everlasting misery, unless we
IX. be recovered by repentance and amendment, and faith in a mediator; ought not a believer in consequence of this to avoid and flee from sin, as destructive to his nature, displeasing to his God? And if he allows himself in any known sin, does he not contradict all the declarations of the gospel that he pretends to believe, and shew that he has no regard for its authority? If the gospel also represents it as the very end of our being, to glorify and serve God here, and to enjoy him for ever hereafter, to have a conversation suitable to this, we ought frequently to worship and adore him, to celebrate his praise, to regard his institutions, and frequent those places that are devoted to his service. But on the contrary, to neglect the worship of him, and to avoid those places that are sacred to his name, contradicts the faith of the gospel, and seems to be a practical atheism. For men can have no serious belief of the existence of God, if they do not worship him; and it is the same with regard to their conduct, as if there was no God. If likewise, the whole scheme of the gospel is founded in love, if it declares the
love

love of God toward mankind, in that S E R M.
while we were yet sinners he sent his only IX.
begotten Son to redeem us, and to purchase our happiness for ever, to have a conversation suitable to this, is, as the apostle expresses it, *to walk in love*; to love mankind, and to have an unbounded benevolence, shewing itself in acts of goodness, and not confined to our relations and friends, but extending to all, so far as our power will permit. And on the contrary, to live in hatred, variance, or enmity with others, is to contradict the gospel and disgrace the profession of it. And in like manner, from all the other articles of our faith, and the different views in which it may be considered, a proper conversation is required of us, *as becometh the gospel.*

3. Since the gospel gives us the most rational and holy precepts for our conduct in life, our conversation ought to be similar and proportionate to them. For nothing can be more inconsistent, than to believe and profess a holy religion, that lays such commandments upon us, and to have no regard to them in our practice. This is to approve with our lips, what we deny by our behaviour.

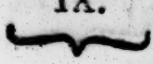
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SERM. The christian precepts are all of them
IX.  so just and pure, and so well calculated to dignify and exalt our nature, that one would imagine, the conversation of a christian would excel all others in justness and sanctity. His life ought in some measure, to exemplify the rules of that school, in which he has been educated. If the gospel enforces sobriety, temperance, and chastity, ought not a christian to be an example of those virtues; sober, regular, and blameless? Ought he not to have the command of his passions, and to be able to stifle every irregular and sensual desire? If benevolence, or universal goodness to all men, is strongly recommended, ought not a christian to excel in good offices, to relieve the distressed, and to promote the happiness of every one in his power? If justice, and an innocent conduct to all men, is absolutely required of us, ought not a christian more especially, to be harmless and without rebuke? Ought he not to be such, upon whose innocence, in all our concerns, we may safely depend with undoubted security? If integrity and fidelity are strongly inculcated upon us, as the amiable distinctions of a christian, should he

he not endeavour to preserve these marks of social duty? In all these instances of virtue and goodness, the conversation of a christian ought to be similar to that holy pattern of morals prescribed to him in the scriptures.

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Again, as the gospel gives a more certain expectation of a future life than we had from the dictates of reason, so our conversation ought in proportion to be suitable to it. For upon a bare probability of another life, one would think, that we should act in such a manner, that our conduct might not obstruct, or destroy our future happiness. For if this short life bears no proportion to eternity, a small probability of that, ought to determine us to a regular and virtuous behaviour; and no pleasures and enjoyments here, can be sufficient to over-balance such a consideration. But if the thing is not only probable, but certain, from the assurances given by the gospel, then the obligation must be much stronger upon us; we ought to point all our actions to the securing of our happiness in that after-state, and our concerns here, ought to be esteemed of little more importance, than as they may promote our everlasting

S E R M. everlasting interest. We ought to regard
IX.  this life, only as an introduction to another much more important, when the present scene will be entirely changed, and where virtue and goodness will be the only availing characters. We ought to act in this case, as men do, when being in one condition or scheme of life, they are soon to pass to a different and more important station; they endeavour to fit themselves for it; they lay aside things of less concern, and conduct themselves so, that their future views may not be obstructed. And here, when we consider the description of that future state in the scriptures, that to good men it shall be a happy and glorious one, free from the imperfections and difficulties of this lower life, that they shall be incorporated into the society of angels, and all the righteous worthies that ever have been in the world, and that they shall enjoy the pleasures which are at God's right hand for ever; and on the contrary, that to wicked men it shall be a state of punishment, a dismal and unhappy condition, with despair and eternal anxiety; I say, when we reflect on this description, it ought eagerly to excite us
to

to behave, so as we may not miss of the promised happiness, and plunge ourselves into everlasting destruction. This view of the final event of them, should always be before us, in all the various schemes and vicissitudes of our life; and then it may produce happy effects, by extending our thoughts beyond our present enjoyments, and restraining our passions within the bounds of our duty. SERM.
IX.

And thus I have endeavoured to represent to you, from the nature of the gospel, what conversation is suitable to it. Let us now in the

II. Place, consider what means may be useful to lead us to such a conversation. And here it will

I. Be obvious to our thoughts, that frequent meditation on the great truths of our holy religion, will be very proper to rectify our conversation, and bring it to *be as becometh the gospel*. Frequent meditation is recommended by philosophical and moral writers, as proper to fix men in the practice of virtue and goodness, and to keep them steady in resisting the enticements of vice. And it must be allowed, that we cannot act rationally

S E R M. tionally and consistently with our cha-
IX. racter and circumstances, without frequent reflection. And hence, the want of reflection is in general, the great unhappiness of mankind; but in religion it is still of worse consequence. For if we do not reflect on the principles and great truths of religion, they cannot possibly have a just influence upon our minds, nor sufficiently direct and guard our practice; but by often thinking on them, they make a stronger impression, and they draw the mind by habit to be determined by them. And indeed, those awful truths which a serious christian is persuaded of, cannot but strongly affect him, and excite him to his duty. For how can we think upon God, and consider his power, his wisdom, and goodness, and that he is ever present with us, and the all-seeing observer of our ways, without being awed with fear and reverence; or how can we reflect on the wonderful work of our redemption, and the most gracious terms of mercy, without adoration and love of him, who was willing to redeem us from all our iniquities, and of that blessed Saviour who gave himself for us; and how can we remember an impartial judgment to

to come, at the tribunal of God, and the eternal consequences of it, without our being strongly disposed to prepare ourselves for so solemn an event. Frequent meditation on such truths, must naturally dispose the mind to act suitably to the importance of them; it must raise the soul above the little enjoyments of this life, and extend its views to its eternal interest. SERM.
IX.

2. Again, frequent reading of the holy scriptures, may be proposed as the means to help us to have our *conversation as becometh the gospel*. For as these contain the whole revelation of God, and our duty to him, we cannot possibly know and learn it, without diligent application to the study of them. And indeed, they contain such a number of pleasing and interesting truths, that they will fully compensate any labour we may have in the perusing of them. And hence, by often reading of them, we shall not only improve in the knowledge of our religion, but its doctrines and precepts also, by being often recalled to our memory, will more easily dispose us to a suitable practice. The frequent perusal of them will, from the various examples of piety and goodness,

goodness, give us a lively image of that holy conversation we ought to imitate. The excellent rules of life, so often repeated and inculcated upon us, will become familiar to the mind; and then they will naturally draw us to follow them. Let us then peruse those sacred books, by which we shall reap such everlasting benefit; and let us not follow the custom of those lukewarm and careless christians, who have almost laid aside the use of them, and to whom they are as a sealed book, which they have no inclination to open. For such can never have a serious regard to their holy religion, nor will their *conversation* ever be such as *becometh the gospel*.

3. The frequenting the company of such men as are religiously and virtuously disposed, may be mentioned, as another means to help us to rectify our conversation. For company has a great influence upon us; and if we are not upon our guard, bad men will insensibly transfuse their notions, their manners, and habits into us. We often see the fatal effects of having bad companions, how they corrupt, ensnare, and pervert the mind; and on the contrary, how good com-

companions polish and enlarge it, and ^{S E R M.} excite us to a proper behaviour. And ^{IX.} therefore, the christian who would be steady in his faith and duty, must avoid being often with those, who may possibly draw him from his integrity. For the beginnings of a defection from religion and goodness, are almost insensible; before we are aware of it, our hearts are ensnared, and habits contracted, which are inconsistent with the character of a serious believer. But he who loves to associate with the good and virtuous, will have his own virtue strengthened, and his principles confirmed; and he will escape many dangerous temptations. The piety and goodness of others will affect him, and very probably, bring him to a similar disposition. Their method, their temper will become familiar, and perhaps, give a happy bias in favour of a virtuous conduct. In general, the behaviour of good christians will appear amiable and rational, and have some influence upon impartial observers; and he who associates with them, is the most likely to have his own *conversation as becometh the gospel.*

considered as a proper means to help us to have our conversation suitable to the gospel. Prayer is the great and comfortable duty of a christian, by which our communication with heaven is maintained ; and it often produces the happiest effects on the mind. And therefore, if a christian is often employed in prayer, his heart will by degrees become better, and his morals be improved. And besides this, it is the means to obtain grace or divine assistance for the performance of our duty ; for God will never deny his grace to those who sincerely ask him. He has promised to hear the prayer of the humble, and therefore he will much more regard it, when they apply for his assistance to enable them to do their duty. And it has been justly observed, that those who are often employed in prayer, for the most part have their conversation more strict and virtuous, and more becoming *the gospel of Christ*.

And thus I have endeavoured to represent to you from the nature of the gospel, the conversation that is suitable to it, and likewise the means by which
we

we may attain to such a disposition and character. From the whole that has been said, let us be excited earnestly to form our lives according to the dictates and temper of the gospel. By this conduct we shall attain to the highest perfection of our nature, and likewise have peace and happiness for ever. We shall have solid satisfaction and pleasure in all the various events of life, and get clear of all those guilty apprehensions and fears, which are the consequences of sin, when we are conscious we have acted a part worthy of our holy profession. And then when death makes its approach, we shall be able to meet it with courage and serenity. The reflection upon our conduct, that we have innocently past our time in the search of religion and virtue, will give sure and rational comfort, when we are about to enter into the invisible world. This will be a cordial upon a death-bed, and will support the christian against all the ghastly terrors which then will surround him. And it will give a comfortable expectation of all the glory and happiness promised to the people of God in the heavenly kingdom. But on the contrary, if instead of having our

S E R M.
IX.

S E R M.

IX.

In the last place, prayer may be considered as a proper means to help us to have our conversation suitable to the gospel. Prayer is the great and comfortable duty of a christian, by which our communication with heaven is maintained ; and it often produces the happiest effects on the mind. And therefore, if a christian is often employed in prayer, his heart will by degrees become better, and his morals be improved. And besides this, it is the means to obtain grace or divine assistance for the performance of our duty ; for God will never deny his grace to those who sincerely ask him. He has promised to hear the prayer of the humble, and therefore he will much more regard it, when they apply for his assistance to enable them to do their duty. And it has been justly observed, that those who are often employed in prayer, for the most part have their conversation more strict and virtuous, and more becoming *the gospel of Christ*.

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S E R M.
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180 *The Conversation that becometh the Gospel.*

S E R M. *conversation as becometh the gospel*, we pass

IX.

our lives in the ways of sin, neglecting God and religion, there remains nothing for us to hope at the end of our time, but, as the apostle expresses it, *a fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation to consume us.* Let us therefore, as we would secure our everlasting well-being, and hope for glory hereafter, endeavour by the help of our God, to have our *conversation as becometh the gospel of Christ.*

S E R M O N X.

CHRIST a Sign which shall be spoken
against.

LUKE II. 34.

*And Simeon blessed them, and said unto
Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set
for the fall and rising again of many in
Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken
against.*

WHEN we consider the various S E R M.
X.
dispositions and tempers of men, 
how ignorant and heedless many
of them are, how conceited and fond of
the notions which they have once ac-
quired, and how often they are hurried
away with the violence of their passions;
when we consider all this, it seems rea-
sonable to think that the christian reli-
gion, so opposite to the prejudices and
vices of men, should at its first appear-
ing in the world, and indeed in all ages
afterwards, meet with great resistance and
persecution. It is from hence obvious

also, that the gospel must have had very different effects upon men, by rendering those happy who sincerely embraced it, and on the contrary, by increasing the misery and just condemnation of those who rejected it. Not that from its own nature it can possibly add to the misery of mankind; it was intended for the benefit and happiness of all; but because men from their own unreasonable conduct and opposition to it may throw themselves into a more miserable state, by making themselves juster objects of the divine displeasure. And this different acceptance of the gospel of our Saviour, and the different effect of it on the world, from the variety of mens tempers, seems to have been fully foretold by the text; when it is said that *this child was set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against.*

These are the words of that good man Simeon, when he saw our Saviour presented in the temple, according to a revelation made to him, that before his decease he should *see the Lord's Christ*; from which it seems plain, that he foresaw what would be the consequence of his appearing in the world, through the
vices

vices and prejudices of some, and the love and affection that others bore to the truth, viz. That he should be an occasion of falling to many, who through their prejudices and vices would oppose and declare themselves enemies to his doctrine; and on the other hand, that he should be the means of raising many of the true Israelites, who would seriously enquire into and consider his pretensions, from the low and imperfect institution of the Mosaic law, to the glorious liberty and perfection of the gospel; and moreover, of exalting many in the gentile world from a state of darkness and vice, to a blessed light and an happy view of immortality. That to those who would accept of him, he would be a Saviour and Mediator, to save them from their sins, and to redeem them from everlasting wrath; but to others, who reject and despise his gospel and obstinately persevere in their vices, he would be a stone of stumbling and rock of offence.

It is farther added in the text, *and for a sign which shall be spoken against.* The word sign seems to be used in allusion to a sign or mark, to which archers point to in order to destroy it, or to fix their

S E R M. darts in it. And it implies, that our Sa-

X. viour by the sanctity of his life and doctrine, and the wonderful works which he performed, should be as conspicuous to the world as a sign exposed to general view, and therefore would be obnoxious to the frequent contradiction and hatred of men; a kind of common mark, to which their malice would be directed. And in this sense it is used by the prophet Isaiah viii. 18. *I and the children whom God hath given me, says he, are for signs in Israel.* And indeed, the event has fully answered this prophecy in the text concerning our Saviour; for *who ever* (to use the apostle's words) *endured such contradiction of sinners against himself?* Not only at the time in which he lived, but in all ages since, his pretensions have been cavilled at, contradicted, and objected to by prophane and vicious men, who cannot endure his easy yoke, because it restrains them from their passions and vices; or by those prejudiced persons, who will not submit their minds to be directed by the light of his gospel.

In the following discourse, I shall briefly consider some of those prejudices, that

CHRIST *a Sign which shall be spoken against.* 185

that men of different education, temper, SERM.
X. and genius have had against our Saviour and his gospel, by which he is in the language of the text *set for the fall of many, and for a sign which shall be spoken against.* In the

1. Place, it was objected to our Saviour in his own time, by the Jews, that he came into the world in a mean and low condition, not worthy of the dignity of the Messias whom they expected. They had got a notion from a false interpretation of their sacred books by the scribes, that the Christ was to come as a temporal deliverer, by whom their government and policy was to be restored to its ancient splendor, and that he was also to obtain an universal dominion in the earth ; and therefore, as our Saviour came in a low manner, was born of obscure and poor parents, and acted as an humble teacher of the divine will, they were offended and prejudiced against him, and rejected his gospel. But the offence plainly arose from their own mistake of his character. For though the prophets had described him in very lofty language, as having universal dominion and bringing deliverance to Israel,

SERM. ^{X.} rael, this was only a spiritual dominion in the hearts of men, and a spiritual deliverance from the darkness and superstition which prevailed in the world, and from the tyranny of sin and all its dismal consequences, and from the yoke and bondage of Levitical ceremonies. For the same prophets had represented him as appearing in an humble character, *despised, and rejected of men.* Now there was no possibility of his appearing in this humble manner, and at the same time having an universal dominion, but by understanding his dominion to be spiritual in the hearts of men. And in this view all the descriptions that are given of him, either in an exalted character, or in a low condition, are consistent, and justly applicable to the same person ; but without this spiritual and moral sense, such opposite characters must constitute two different persons ; which is contrary to the plain meaning of the prophets, who always intend but one and the same Messias or Christ. And therefore, this objection of the Jews in our Saviour's time, and at this day, that he appeared in a manner unworthy the dignity of his character, arose from their own ignorance

rance and mistake of the meaning of S E R M.
their prophets. X.

2. On the other hand, the Gentiles, and those among them that delighted in oratory and elegancy of language, were offended at the plain and artless manner in which the truths of the gospel were delivered by the first preachers of it. But this prejudice arose from their weakness, in not considering the circumstances of the case. For if the gospel had appeared at first with all the advantages which men of letters could have given it, that very thing would have been a presumption against its truth. It might then have been said, and with some plausibility, that it was a fable, artfully set off by ingenious men, and that it could not bear a plain and natural representation; whereas the truths of God, and a revelation from him, do not want the embellishments of wit and literature; they are rational and consistent in themselves, and will always satisfy every serious enquirer. For embellishments are chiefly required where there is some defect, or some weakness, that wants to be coloured over or artfully concealed. Nor perhaps, did it become the majesty of a revelation
from

SERM. from God, to be set off with the same
X. kind of ornaments which things of human invention require; for the innate propriety, justness, and goodness of the revelation ought always to shew its divine original.

3. Again, it greatly prejudiced the Gentiles against the gospel, that it made so great an innovation. They could not easily bear to think that all the religion which had been so long established among them, should be found to be false and displeasing to God. It was difficult for them to give up all the stories and adventures of their gods, to quit all the idolatrous worship and ceremonies, which in honour of them, they usually performed; and to take up with a new scheme of religion, whose doctrines and principles were opposite to the former, and which taught them the method of salvation through a crucified Redeemer. And besides this, the temporal interest of many of them was connected with their religion. Their priests, and those who were supported by it, were to lose their gain, which is always the strongest prejudice against truth of whatever kind. Their temples were to be deserted, their sacrifices

sacrifices and gifts were to cease, their whole theology to be rejected as fabulous and absurd, and they themselves to be considered as impostors. And hence, arose that terrible persecution in the first ages of christianity, from the apprehensions and malice of those who were interested in the heathen idolatry; who excited magistrates and others in power, to destroy the professors of a new religion, whom they could not confute by reason and argument. SERM.
X.

4. Another prejudice which both Jews and Gentiles had against the gospel, was the meanness and obscurity of the first preachers. They could not conceive why providence should employ such low instruments in propagating a divine revelation. They were used to have their sacred offices often performed by their princes and great men; and as for their priests, they were generally men of erudition and skill. But here the wisdom of God may be observed; for had the first preachers of the gospel been princes or great men, they might have been suspected of some political contrivance; but as they were poor and illiterate men, the arts of policy were above them, nor could

SERM. could they use any compulsive methods
 X. to spread their doctrine; their success
 therefore, must be attributed to that almighty power and grace which accompanied them, and favoured their cause.

These were some of the prejudices that men had against the gospel, in the first ages of christianity, by which our Saviour was set for the fall of many, and for a sign which was spoken against. But in these later times, as men have long had the evidences for revealed religion laid before them, so in every age, the keenness that they have for the vices which it discourages, has excited men of different tempers to increase the number of their objections. And in the

1. Place, men of debauched and vicious dispositions are prejudiced against the scheme of the gospel, because they think it is too strict and severe, and does not allow them sufficient liberty to indulge themselves in their pleasures, which they esteem inconsistent with the goodness of God. But in answer to this it may justly be said, that the gospel prohibits no pleasures which the law of nature does not likewise condemn, and therefore, that this prejudice lies against all religion

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religion and virtue. For all the moral part of christianity can be easily shewn to be rational and just, and worthy of the divine authority. The best and wisest of the heathens have declared, as it were, in concert with the gospel, against the same sensual pleasures. For instance, they have condemned fornication, and an indiscriminate use of women, while they have recommended chastity. They have condemned adultery, and considered it as the confusion of mankind, and as a violation of property; while they have recommended marriage as useful to society, and productive of social happiness. And in general, all the precepts of the gospel, may be proved to be founded in the nature of things, and useful to mankind; and almost all of them, are by some one or other of the heathen writers, strongly recommended. And it may be justly said, that the purity of the moral part of the gospel, is so far from being an objection to the virtuous and well-disposed, that is a strong presumption of its truth. It is indeed, an honour to our holy religion, that libertines and profane men object to the severity and strictness of its morals. To such the
gospel

S E R M.
X.

S E R M. gospel of our Saviour will be the occasion
 X. of their fall and condemnation, because
 light is come into the world, and they
 have loved *darkness rather than light, be-
 cause their deeds are evil.*

2. Again, some political men, who
 imagine they see far into things, are pre-
 judiced against christianity, because our
 Saviour at first appeared in an obscure
 country, in Judea, to work his miracles
 and publish his gospel, and not at Rome,
 which was then the grand theatre of the
 world, where his pretensions might have
 been more easily examined. Now in an-
 swer to this, it may be justly said, in ge-
 neral, that we are in many cases, very
 unfit to determine what it is proper for
 God to do in the course of his provi-
 dence. For as we are short sighted crea-
 tures, we may find fault with many
 things, which it is just and right for God
 to do in his government of the world.
 But to be more particular, it may be also
 said, that the Jews were not an obscure
 nation, but a very powerful and nume-
 rous people, and perhaps, had more in-
 habitants in their country, than were in
 any other of the same extent in the world;
 for in their wars with the Romans, they
 were

were so formidable both in number and valour, that had it not been for the supply which the Romans had from their conquered provinces, they could not have been vanquished by them. There were also vast numbers of them dispersed over all countries, ever since the Babylonish captivity, who kept a continual correspondence with their metropolis, Jerusalem; and all of them frequently went thither to *celebrate their passover*; by which means, there was a communication with Judea, over all Asia and Europe, where they were scattered. And hence, whatever was done at Jerusalem, especially at the passover, was as likely to be known over all the world, as what was done at Rome; for at that time there were at least as many people at Jerusalem. Our Saviour then appearing at Jerusalem at the passover, and performing his miracles, his fame was as likely to be known as at Rome; and the witnesses who saw his works there, were as credible persons, as could have been in any nation whatever; and there was as much opportunity for strangers to search into the truth of the facts that were done, as could be at any other place.

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X.

place. But on the other hand, suppose our Saviour had appeared and performed his miracles at Rome, that very circumstance would have been a great objection in all the conquered countries. For as the Romans had enslaved the greatest part of the world, and erected an universal empire, the nations would have had an aversion to every thing that came from Rome; they would have been naturally suspicious of every thing that was done there, as if it were designed and propagated merely to serve the purpose of their conquerors, and to fasten their chains upon them.

3. It is objected by others, that if the gospel was of divine original, it would have been universal, that all might have the benefit of it; but as it is only given to a small part of the world, they think this inconsistent with the goodness of God, who would distribute his favours impartially. To which it may be briefly answered, that God hath given to all mankind some knowledge of his will, by giving them reason, and understanding, and a law written in their hearts, by which they may know so much of God and of their duty, that by the due use of
their

their powers they all may be happy; but SERM.
X.
he may give some particular advantages }

to some, above others, by affording them farther means of the knowledge of himself, and of their duty, by which they may be still in a happier state. As God may make different orders of rational creatures, some in a more exalted state, and some in a lower, so he may give to some of the same order and kind peculiar advantages, by which they may greatly differ from others; and he may have just reasons for doing so, which we cannot comprehend. *Known unto God are all his works from the beginning.* It seems to be fit that God should give the means of happiness to all his rational creatures, if they do not abuse his goodness; but he can never be obliged to make them all equally happy. As the absolute sovereign of the universe, he has a right to bestow his favours and goodness in what manner and proportion he pleases. If indeed, all who had not the benefit of the gospel were to be miserable, the objection would be just; but as the gospel only makes one part happier than another, such a dispensation can never be inconsistent with the goodness

SERM. of God. And in fact, we see from the
X. effects of his providence, that he never
intended that all men should be equally
happy. In this world, we see some re-
gions blessed with a more happy situation
than others, having warm and healthy
climates, generous soil, and plenty of all
the comforts of life; while other coun-
tries are cold, barren, and unhealthy.
And as our habitations on this earth are
thus unequally distributed, so there is a
great difference in the natural genius and
faculties of different nations; some are
sprightly and ingenious, others are dull,
and incapable of making great improve-
ments in literature, and others even re-
markable for their stupidity and igno-
rance. And as we see this unequal dis-
tribution of things among nations, so it
is among individuals; some are happy
in genius, constitution, and natural en-
dowments, while others are of low ca-
pacity, weak, and unhealthy, and brought
into the world in difficult circumstances.
Now there can be no reason given for
the conduct of providence in those in-
stances, but only, that it is the pleasure
of the Almighty, to make infinitely vari-
ous degrees of felicity among his reason-
able

able creatures. And all those different SERM.
degrees of happiness are not only in the X.
lower concerns of life, but in the most
important of all, in those which are es-
sential to our well-being. And there-
fore, if such inequalities are visible in
the conduct of providence, why may not
it also give a revelation unequally? For
if revelation advances men to a better
state, and gives them surer means of
their eternal salvation, so does a greater
natural genius, capacity, and other ad-
vantages. And consequently, if provi-
dence is partial in the one case, so it is
also in the other; and if there be any
thing in the objection, it must be of force
against natural religion as well as re-
vealed.

4. It is objected to the gospel, that
some of its doctrines are unintelligible
and unreasonable, and therefore unwor-
thy to come from an infinitely wise and
perfect being. To which it may be an-
swered, that there are no such doctrines
in the scriptures; that what we are
taught therein is rational, consistent with,
and agreeable to our natural ideas of
God, and our duty to him. It is true,
some absurd and unreasonable doctrines

S E R M. have been pretended to be deduced from

X.

the scriptures, but a reasonable man, who makes a fair enquiry, cannot possibly find them. There are indeed, some passages expressed in a strong figurative way, suitable to the genius of the people, and the age in which they were wrote, and about which commentators have greatly differed. And some attending only to the sound of the words, and not considering the nature of the thing, have fallen into false notions, neither consistent with other passages nor supported by reason. While others, with great violence to the text, have endeavoured to explain every thing according to some pre-conceived system. And hence, christians have been divided among themselves into parties and sects. But the fault is not in the obscurity of the scriptures, but in the disposition and narrow minds of the interpreters themselves. And if men would take reason for their guide, and read them without any bias to any party, they would easily see, that the whole doctrine contained in them is worthy of God. There is a rational and good scheme of religion laid down in the scriptures, which is
easy

easy and plain to every serious enquirer, SERM.
X. who will use his reason; but if men are diverted from this, and will seek after mystical and enthusiastic interpretations, this can never be a just objection to christianity. Nor is it fair, to impute the absurd notions of any sect of christians whatever, to the gospel itself, unless they are certainly contained in it, and received by all of them. It is true, there are some doctrines plainly delivered, that we could not have discovered by reason, such as the mediation of Christ, the excellency of his nature, the existence and operations of the Holy Ghost, and the resurrection of the body; but there are none of them absurd and contrary to our reason, and they are as intelligible to our low capacities, as other things which reason teaches us, concerning the nature and attributes of God. And besides, they are all useful to the best moral purposes. So that if nothing can be objected to them as unworthy of God, we ought to receive them when there is other convincing proof of their divine original.

From what has been said, I shall now make the following reflections.

1. We may see from hence, that christians have good reason to be satisfied in their own minds concerning the truth of our holy religion, seeing all the objections to it, which have been suggested in the different ages of the world, vanish upon a serious and impartial examination. Instead of doing any harm, the opposition of infidels has done service, in making the evidences for the gospel more accurately examined, and the whole of it better understood. As during the persecutions of the church, the more it was afflicted, the more it grew; so the attacks and objections that have been made, have tended to make the gospel more illustrious and amiable. And if it has been able to support itself against all the wit and malice of men through so many ages, we may well conclude that it will continue victorious to the end of time.

2. We may see, that though God has given sufficient evidence for the truth of our holy religion, he has given it in such a manner, that vicious men through the violence of their passions and vices, may find difficulties to cavil at, and thereupon reject it, and fall into misery. But the fault is in themselves, that they do not
examine

CHRIST a Sign which shall be spoken against. 201

examine with seriousness and integrity of S E R M.
heart. God indeed, might have given X.
stronger and irresistible evidence, but
why should he give more, if what he has
given be sufficient? For all but the vici-
ous and immoral will be satisfied, after a
reasonable and honest enquiry. And
God was not obliged to give more for the
sake of those who are fond of their sinful
pleasures; God deals with us as with rati-
onal creatures, he does not force us into
our duty, but he leads us to it by rati-
onal and gentle means, or in the words
of the prophet, he *draws us by the cords*
of a man.

In the last place, let us who have seri-
ously embraced the gospel, endeavour by
our life and conversation, to *let our light*
so shine before men, that they seeing our good
works, may glorify our Father which is in
heaven. Let us take care to do no dis-
honour to our holy religion, and to give
no offence to infidels and libertines, by
any vicious or immoral behaviour; but
let us be innocent and harmless, as the
children of God without rebuke, in the midst
of a crooked and perverse generation.

S E R-

Carrier a sign which shall be spoken against. 201
 examine with thoroughness and integrity of spirit.
 That God indeed might have given
 stronger and irrefragable evidence, but
 why should he give more, if what he has
 given be sufficient for all but the vici-
 cious and immoral will be satisfied, after a
 reasonable and honest enquiry. And
 God was not obliged to give more for the
 sake of those who are fond of their sinful
 pleasures; God deals as thus as with rail-
 road engineers, he does not force us into
 our duty, but he leads us to it by rail-
 road and gentle means, or in the words
 of the prophet, he draws us by the reins
 of a man.
 In the last place, let us who have sin-
 cely embraced the gospel, endeavor by
 our life and conversation to let our light
 shine before men, that they being urged
 to do so, may glorify in that which is
 done. But we take care to do no dis-
 honor to our holy religion, and to give
 no offence to infidels and libertines, by
 any vicious or immoral behaviour, but
 let us be innocent and harmless, as the
 children of God without guile in the midst
 of a crooked and perverse generation.

S E R M O N XI.

Persecution not consistent with
Christianity.

LUKE IX. 56.

*For the Son of man is not come to destroy
mens lives, but to save them.*

IT is a very common thing for men S E R M.
XI.
in the violence of their passions, to
imagine that God is affected in be-
half of their particular cause, and against
that of others, in the same manner as
they themselves are. For as they are
persuaded that themselves are in the
right, they suppose others might see things
in the same light if they would; and
they generally impute it to obstinacy and
perverseness, that they do not yield to
what they judge to be the truth. And
hence, they conclude that God ought to
assist them and depress others, just as
their zeal and warm imagination make
them wish. Thus they form such a
character of the divine Being, as may
happen

SERM. happen to be most agreeable to their
XI. own.—A remarkable instance of this we
have in the chapter where the text is;
our Saviour with his disciples, coming
through the country of the Samaritans,
who were worshippers of the true God,
though with great ignorance and super-
stition, desired to lodge in one of their
villages; but they from wrong preju-
dices against him, or probably, from an
inveterate dislike of the Jewish nation in
general, would not receive him. Upon
which his disciples being greatly enraged,
and making no allowance for the igno-
rance and prejudices of the Samaritans,
immediately concluded, that this must
proceed from a wilful disregard to truth,
and the cause of their master. And
therefore, as they imagined that God
judged of things according to their par-
tial view, they made no scruple to invoke
the Almighty for his judgments upon
them. *Lord, say they, wilt thou that we
command fire to come down from heaven to
consume them?* Upon which, our Saviour
makes this just and humane answer, *Ye
know not what manner of spirit ye are of;
for the Son of man is not come to destroy
mens lives, but to save them.* As if he had
said,

saïd, ye are not sensible of your own weak S E R M.
and imperfect view of things, and how XI.
much you are blinded and imposed upon
by your passions; and you consider not that
these Samaritans may be urged by mis-
taken though conscientious zeal, for what
they esteem to be right, in which case,
they are rather the objects of your pity
than of your resentment. Must the su-
preme God destroy such as have a serious
regard for goodness, because they may
possibly entertain false notions? To pro-
pagate the truth with force and violence,
was never the design of revelation, but
rather to protect men in their natural
liberties, and by meek and gentle me-
thods to instruct them, that they may
receive it from reasonable principles.
Which answer of our Saviour plainly
proves, that he was an enemy to all vi-
olence and severity in religious matters.
The Samaritans refused to receive him
and his gospel, being blinded with their
prejudices and superstitious opinions; but
he bears this mildly, and checks his dis-
ciples for shewing their resentment. Now
as it is the doctrine of the church of
Rome, and even of some weak pro-
testants, that men should be urged even
by

by tortures, to receive what they call the true religion; I shall, in opposition to her sentiments and practice, endeavour

I. To shew from several considerations, the unreasonableness and absurdity of using violent methods with men, upon the account of their religious opinions. And then

II. Make some practical reflections.

And this subject, I hope, will not be improper for this day, on which we commemorate our deliverance from a horrid conspiracy, contrived by some furious zealots of the church of Rome, to extirpate the protestant religion in this kingdom.

That no violence or hard treatment ought to be offered to men upon the account of their religious opinions, will be evident, if we consider

I. The nature of the mind of man. In the mind there are two principal faculties or powers commonly observed, the judgment or reasoning faculty, and the will. Now the will is that faculty of the mind, by which we have power over our moral actions, and are perfectly

fectly free, especially with regard to virtue and vice, being under no necessity to act in any particular manner, which would make us mere machines, impelled as it were, and incapable of rewards and punishments. But in the exercise of the first of these, the judgment, there is no freedom to the mind; for we judge and reason according to the ideas or apprehensions we have of things. If we have a clear perception of the thing we are reasoning about, if we see how it differs from other things, and know its several properties distinctly, then we can clearly reason and judge about it. And on the contrary, if we have only an obscure or confused perception of it, and do not see its properties distinctly, and how far it agrees with other things, our judgment and reasoning may then be often false and inconclusive. And it is plain, that in our perception of things we are often passive, or at least for the most part, they are not in our own power. For as when we see material objects, we cannot help seeing them as they appear to us, with some particular properties; so it is with regard to the moral objects that present themselves to
the

SERM.

XI.

the mind, as good and evil, just and unjust, false and true, and the like, we cannot possibly help perceiving them as they appear to us. For as when a man views a body of a particular form; he cannot think that he sees it in another form; so if the mind perceives a thing to be good, just, true, and the like, it cannot force itself to think otherwise; nothing but a new and different perception of the object, which is not in his power, can make him to apprehend it to be evil, unjust, or false. Nor can he dissemble with himself in his apprehension of things, for he must think of them as they really appear to him. And the different appearance of the same object to different persons, must arise either from the various strength and acuteness of their minds, or from the imperfect, partial, or wrong representations of the thing. And hence it appears, that the notions of men, and the conclusions they make in their search after truth, are not in their own power; as they necessarily arise from the appearance of things, in which they are in a manner passive. Men indeed, may forbear to think upon a subject, and may refuse farther information

mation about it, and so confine their views of it; but when they exert themselves to the utmost, and consider it as far as they are capable, they cannot then hinder the determination of their mind. If then, men cannot help their judgment and conclusions on any subject, if they will think at all about it, how unreasonable and absurd must it be to punish and torture them on account of their belief, or notions in religion? And how much more horrid to seal their punishments with death. For as it is cruel and barbarous to destroy men for what they were forced to do, so it is equally monstrous to afflict them for their religious opinions, which they have it not in their power to model as they please. It is true, it may be said, that severity will make men more seriously consider their notions, and be more cautious in drawing their conclusions; and therefore perhaps, may hinder them from falling into error. But to this it is an easy answer, that severity may indeed hinder men from thinking at all on particular subjects, or from receiving farther information, or it may induce them to conceal their private sentiments; but

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when

SERM. when they consider any thing as far as
XI. they are able, and receive all the light
they can possibly have about it, they
cannot then help their notions; no dis-
tress or torment whatever can make
truth appear falsehood; so that punish-
ment or persecution for religious notions
can never alter the real sentiments, but
only make men dissemble, or play the
hypocrite, or not think at all upon the
matter. And in fact, we see in those
countries where this spiritual tyranny pre-
vails, that the sensible part of men either
dissemble or suppress their sentiments, or
will not indulge themselves in a free in-
quiry, lest they should be drawn into
opinions destructive of their interest.

2. But farther, the unreasonableness
of doing violence to men on account of
religious opinions, is plain, if we con-
sider the nature of religion in general.
Religion is a persuasion of being obliged
to act in obedience to the command-
ments of God. And can any such per-
suasion be infused into men by force and
violence? or can they ever be made sen-
sible of their obligation to God by hu-
man compulsion? Persuasion, or belief of
any thing, can only arise from rational
means,

means, instructing the understanding, S E R M.
and moving the will : and to use forcible XI.
methods of persuasion, is as inconsistent
with our reasonable nature, as it would
be to move or alter the sentiments of our
minds with machines. We cannot there-
fore obey God by being compelled to
any particular action ; because obedience
to him must proceed from a full persua-
sion of our duty to him, and a desire of
performing it. And as God is of a spi-
ritual nature, and all our thoughts, even
the inmost recesses of our soul, are ob-
vious to him, no act can be religious, or
acceptable to him, that does not arise
from the inward, rational, and voluntary
disposition of the mind. Can we sup-
pose any service will be pleasing to him
which was performed only by the out-
ward man, to which the mind does not
consent, and to which the person is ne-
cessarily impelled as an instrument, or a
piece of mere matter ? Is it to be thought
that love, hope, confidence in God, or
any other devout acts of the mind, are
ever to be effected by violence ? Or can
any worship or service done to him be of
any value, when it does not come from
the heart ? Such is the temper of our
P 2 minds,

SERM. XI. minds, that we are more apt to dislike those acts to which we are necessarily driven, than by any necessity to be brought inwardly to approve or consent to them. If we were forced by threats and tortures to perform any service to an earthly prince, could he have any pleasure in it, or any regard to us upon that account? And shall we think that the most perfect being, can ever be pleased without the rational and voluntary determination of the mind? And therefore, it is so far from being a means of doing honour to God, to force men with violence to worship or serve him in any particular manner, that such services must be highly displeasing to him, and bring guilt upon the souls of men. And it is even natural to think, the violent imposing of religious notions and practices upon men, which they cannot be reasonably persuaded of, may lead them to atheistical principles, or make them believe that all religion is an imposture, when its doctrines are thus tyrannically propagated. Again,

3. As the doing violence to men upon the account of their religious opinions, is thus contrary to the nature of religion in

in general, so it is in particular against S E R M.
XI.
the temper and spirit of the gospel. In the New Testament, our Saviour and his apostles do not only disclaim all violence and force in propagating their religion, but also encourage and exhort all to a free enquiry concerning the truth of their pretensions; giving liberty to men, to form their notions according to the evidence of things. Thus our Saviour tells the Jews to search the scriptures, and not to take things only upon his authority; for says he, *these are they which testify of me.* And again, he urged them to examine his works, whether they did not prove his divine mission. *If I do not my Father's works, believe me not; but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works.* And for this reason, the Bereans are commended in the Acts of the Apostles, because they *searched the scriptures daily.* And to the same purpose we are exhorted by St. Peter, to be ready to give an *answer to every man that asketh a reason of the hope that is in us.* And again, to *prove all things, and to try the spirits whether they are of God.* From all which passages, and many others, it is plain that the doctrines of christianity never

SERM. were designed to be imposed with violence
XI. on mankind; but that men were to be
reasoned into them, to be convinced of
their evidence, and the reasonableness of
them, or in the language of the prophet
Hosea, to be *drawn by the cords of a man*.

And as force and violence are thus
contrary to the liberty which the gospel
allows of judging for ourselves, so are
they contrary to the peaceable temper
and brotherly affection to which christi-
ans are frequently exhorted. For how
can we be said to be at peace with men,
and to have any affection for them, when
we are offering violence to them, and
treating them as the worst of criminals.
If the great commandment in the gospel
is *love*, how can that be obeyed by bring-
ing distress and misery on others? Or
should the duty of endeavouring to con-
vert men to the faith, make us forget
another of equal importance?

It is our duty indeed, earnestly to en-
deavour to convert men, and to bring
them to the true knowledge of God.
For, says St. James, *he who converteth a
sinner from the error of his way, shall save
a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude
of sins*. But this is to be done by rati-
onal

onal means, by brotherly instruction and admonition, by bearing with mens weakness, and ignorance, and by making great allowance for the prejudices of education, which are not easily overcome. All our reasonings should be in tendernefs and love, not unnecessarily offending men, but suiting ourselves to their temper and capacities, as was the method of Christ and his apostles; who never used those compulsive methods, which naturally alienate the mind from the truth. But if men remain irreclaimable, if they will not hearken to reason and the plain dictates of the scripture, if they will shut their eyes from the light, we are then to leave them to God, who only knows the hearts, and how far they are excusable; *shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?* We are not even then to pronounce sentence upon them, or condemn them, for, as the apostle says, *who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth.*

But it may be said, are not the corrupted members to be cut off, that the whole body be not infected? To which it may be answered, that the infection is

SERM. to be prevented, if possible, by public
 XI. rebuke and admonition; but that no
 men whatsoever, are fit and infallible judges
 to determine who are the corrupted in
 matters of faith and opinion. For though
 we may be often sure that men are in
 the wrong, and may see their errors evi-
 dently; yet as we know not whether this
 arises from the weakness and prejudices
 of the understanding, or the obstinacy
 and viciousness of the will, we have no
 right to say who are corrupt and vicious.
 If they are weak, they are to be treated
 with tenderness and compassion. *Him*
that is weak in the faith, receive ye, says
 the apostle. And, therefore, as men can-
 not penetrate into the minds of men, nor
 discern the true cause of their sentiments,
 God only, who sees into the first springs
 of action, can have a right to determine
 upon them.

In the last place, the unreasonableness
 and absurdity of doing violence to men
 upon the account of their religious opini-
 ons, is evident from experience. For
 from history we find that the strongest
 attempts of persecutors in different ages,
 have never been successful. They never
 were able to form mens minds, and oblige
 them

them to think as they would have them; SERM. XI.
and indeed it was impossible they should, without altering their very nature. In the times of the Maccabees, when a potent idolatrous prince, that ruled over the eastern world, was determined to compel the Jews to a conformance with his mode of religion, we find that notwithstanding his vast armies, and the cruel slaughters he made, he could never bring over any considerable number to the worship of his idols. And in the times of the ancient Roman emperors, when they determined to extirpate christianity, which was then beginning to get footing in the world, we see that after ten persecutions, continued through several reigns, they were so far from destroying it by all the instruments of torture they could invent, that on the contrary, it was successful and victorious, and the blood of the martyrs was the seed, and the increase of the church. And in later ages, in the beginning of the reformation, when the court of Rome saw that they could not maintain their doctrines by reason and scripture, and were determined to force men into their church, by demanding an implicit faith,
after

S E R M. after all the execution they have done by
XI. fire and sword, they have never been able
to extinguish the protestant religion, or
indeed, to convert any one kingdom by
such cruel and barbarous means. In
some places indeed, they have rooted it
out by slaughter and banishment, but
they could never bring over the majority
of its professors, by any threat or vio-
lence whatever. In France we see, that
though the protestants there did never
bear any great proportion to the whole
kingdom, they could never gain them,
nor bring them under by any oppression
whatever, till they pronounced a general
sentence of banishment against them.
And in the Low Countries, we see that
Holland, by having the inquisition set up
there, was lost to the court of Rome;
which otherwise, by gentler methods she
might have retained. And here in Bri-
tain, their horrid methods of violence by
general persecutions, have fixed such a
rooted aversion in the people to that cruel
church, that she has, I hope, lost this
kingdom for ever. And I might add,
that even among protestants themselves,
when they have through weakness and
passion used severity and violence to one
another,

another, on account of their different S E R M.
opinions, the stronger party always weak- XI.
ened themselves by such means; and the
bulk of the other could never be brought
over by any distress whatever, but rather
multiplied in numbers. And amongst
ourselves we know, that since the tolera-
tion granted to all protestant dissenters,
and that they have been used with lenity,
they have not increased in number as
when they were in distress, but on the
contrary, are much fewer and daily di-
minish. So that from experience, which
is always considered as the most con-
vincing argument, it seems plain that
violence has never been successful in pro-
pagating any religious opinions among
mankind; but that it rather increases
their prejudices and raises their passions,
against whatever is forcibly imposed
upon them.

And thus I have endeavoured briefly
to shew, the unreasonableness and absur-
dity of doing violence to men on the ac-
count of their religious opinions. But
there is one objection usually made to
this doctrine, which I shall mention. It
is said, we read of *force* used in the Old
Testament, in order to bring men over
to

S E R M. to the true religion. As in 2 Chron. xv.
 XI. *in the reign of Aſa, king of Judah, the
 people entered into a covenant to ſeek the
 Lord God of their fathers—and that who-
 ſoever would not ſeek the Lord God of Iſrael
 ſhould be put to death.* And in Deut. xiii.
 the perſon that endeavours to turn away
 people from ſerving the Lord, we are
 told, *is to be put to death.* To which it is
 answered, that the perſons there meant
 to be put to death, were idolaters, that
 had turned from ſerving the true God,
 after they had the knowledge of him, to
 worſhip idols, wood and ſtone; which
 ſeems not to be an error of the judg-
 ment, but a voluntary and heinous crime,
 equally inconſiſtent with natural and re-
 vealed religion; and which, perhaps,
 they were guilty of from worldly views,
 or from a wilful oppoſition to the truth.
 And therefore, as it was not from a miſ-
 guided judgment, but from the perverſe-
 neſs of the will, ſuch idolaters were juſtly
 condemned. And beſides, in that par-
 ticular caſe there might be an expreſs
 commandment from God, which no
 other people could ever pretend to; for
 as the Iſraelites were the peculiar people
 of God, ſeparated from the idolatrous
 nations

nations around them, and intended by S E R M.
providence for the preserving of the true XI.
knowledge of God in the world, some
particular laws might be proper for them,
which were never intended for mankind
in general.

From the whole of what has been said,
we may make the following reflections.

1. From hence we plainly see, how
absurd it is for christians to impose on
one another their religious opinions by
force and violence. For if the nature of
the human mind is free, and its motions
voluntary ; and if the gospel allows men
the liberty of judging for themselves,
then it is the most unreasonable tyranny
to deprive them of that liberty, which
God by nature and revelation has given
them. Christians of almost all denomi-
nations have been guilty in this way ;
and there are even some protestants, who
through their ignorance, or perhaps,
love of power, would willingly impose
their religious sentiments on others by
compulsion ; but it is only the church
of Rome, that would openly force her
doctrines on mens consciences with fire
and sword. It is she only that hath
often

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XI.

often made the christian world a scene of horror, by such barbarities as would have been shocking to the heathen world. However, by her cruelties she has sufficiently shewn that her cause is not of God; for the merciful Father of the universe could never authorise such inhuman methods, as are the dishonour of the christian name.

2. From hence also we may see, that we ought in charity to bear with one another, and to shew no resentment against those who may have different sentiments in religion. For if our Saviour in his gospel allows a free inquiry, and if from the various tempers, education, and prejudices of men, they must in consequence think differently about some things, it becomes us with benevolence and tenderness to bear with their weakness and ignorance. And thus by treating them with charity and compassion, gently lead them into the paths of truth and happiness.

S E R-

S E R M O N XII.

The Christian Perfection.

MATTHEW V. 48.

*Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which
is in heaven is perfect.*

TH E S E words were spoken by S E R M.
XII.
our Saviour in his sermon upon
the mount, in which he ex-
horts his disciples to imitate the perfec-
tion of God in their practice, as the
great pattern of goodness and truth. He
means his perfection in the moral attri-
butes and character, his holiness, righ-
teous justice, mercy, and faithfulness, in
which all rational creatures are in some
degree capable of imitating him. For
as to his natural attributes, his power,
wisdom, knowledge, and the like, they
are beyond our imitation. Not that we
are to imagine, that we can ever be so
perfect as God is in his moral character;
but that there is a perfection suitable to
our nature and circumstances, which we
may

S E R M. may arrive at, and which we are obliged
 XII. to endeavour after.

And is it possible then, that we who are such frail and sinful creatures, can ever come to perfection? Is it possible, that we who have such strong vicious habits, and are accustomed to do evil; that we who are so ignorant, and have such deep rooted prejudices, can ever hope to arrive at moral perfection? This indeed is difficult to be imagined, but it is not beyond the power of the Spirit of our God. That we may then form to ourselves a right notion of this perfection we are capable of, and be excited to acquire it, I shall in the following discourse, endeavour

I. To consider perfection in general.
 And then

II. Represent to you that perfection under the gospel, to which christians may possibly attain.

I. Then, I am to consider perfection in general. Now the perfection of any reasonable being consists chiefly, in the intenseness or strength of its rational powers, and the rectitude of its acting.

In

In the intensity of the rational powers S E R M.
XII.
no creature can be absolutely perfect; for such a perfection must be infinite, because that which admits of any farther degree of perfection can never be absolutely perfect: but there may be an absolute rectitude of moral acting, without an absolute perfection in the faculties. And hence, God only can be absolutely perfect in both these, as he is infinite in his moral and natural attributes. He is the fountain of all perfection, the original pattern from which all the creatures borrow what is excellent in their nature. There is a certain perfection that is suitable to every being according to its rank and circumstances. Infinite perfection becomes the Creator of all things; and finite perfection, in various degrees, is suitable to the several orders of intelligence among the creatures. And there are some of them that very much resemble the original pattern, both in their powers and their acting. Thus angels, those ministring spirits of God, of whom we read often in the scriptures, are described as most perfect creatures; of far superior wisdom, knowledge, and power, and as acting in the most exact manner,

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accord-

S E R M. according to the will of their great Cre-
 XII. ator. And their perfection is as great
 as their finite nature will admit of. And
 in general, it must be said, that all the
 creatures of God, when they come first
 from his hand are perfect, with regard
 to the purposes for which he made them.
 Some of these purposes require greater
 faculties, and a more excellent nature;
 and for others a lower degree is suffici-
 ent: but from the wisdom of God, we
 may conclude, that they were all at first
 perfect in their several orders. Those of
 them which are rational, and endowed
 with moral powers, may lose their per-
 fection, or fall from it by an abuse of
 their liberty; they may debase the ex-
 cellency of their nature, and incur the
 divine displeasure. Accordingly we find
 that some of the angels, those exalted
 spirits, fell from their original rectitude,
 and are now degraded to a state in
 which they live monuments of God's
 displeasure, and examples of his justice.

With regard to man, who is placed in
 a middle order, between the highest of
 rational beings and the brute creation,
 we find that he was at first created in a
 perfect manner after the image of God,
 pure

pure and innocent. By the image of ^{S E R M.} God, we are to understand our rational ^{XII.} nature ; the faculties of the soul, that capacity for holiness and purity by which man was distinguished, and made superior to the animal world. Through the abuse of his liberty by sin, he fell indeed from that perfection, and reduced himself to his present state. Yet still we find there are some remains of the image of God in the soul, some lineaments of its original perfection. For reason and knowledge, when untainted with the prejudices arising from vice and evil habits, and also our moral sentiments, do still bear a strong likeness of the divine nature and perfections. And from what we are now, we may conjecture what our nature was when it was first formed, and as yet untainted.

We are now then in an imperfect state ; occasioned by our fall from our primitive rectitude, by sin having, as the apostle says, *entered into the world*. And we find, that some of the sages among the heathens, were very sensible of the general depravation ; but what was the cause of it they could not certainly discover. And they endeavoured

SERM. by a vigorous application to the search
XII. after knowledge, and the practice of virtue, to recover themselves and the rest of mankind, to that state from which they supposed them to have degenerated; but the work was too great and difficult for mere natural abilities. And in this we have greatly the advantage of them, by the assistance that revelation has given us. For the design of the gospel is to recover us to that state from which we were fallen, to our original perfection; by discovering to us those great truths which it was necessary for us to know, and representing to us a perfect system of morals for our practice, and by directing us to the means by which we may be enabled to perform our duty. If then we receive the gospel, and use the means which it proposes for our recovery, we have the strongest assurances that we shall at length be restored to our primitive condition; to that degree of perfection which our nature is capable of, and which will compleat our happiness. And this leads me to the

II. Thing proposed, how far christians can attain to perfection under the gospel.

gospel. When we consider the great and affecting truths delivered in the scriptures, how perfect a system of morals they are, and in how clear a manner our duty is urged upon us, and what promises we have of the grace and assistance of the Spirit of our God to help our endeavours, one would almost expect that all believers should become perfect. But on the other hand, when we reflect on the corruption and weakness which sin has produced in our nature, the force of evil habits, our heedlessness, and the influence of temptations to which we are continually exposed, we cannot possibly imagine that we shall ever here arrive at perfection. The present state of human nature does not allow of it. For as it is said in the book of Wisdom, ix. 15. *The corruptible body presseth down the soul, and the earthly tabernacle weigheth down the mind.* But nevertheless, there is some degree of perfection within our reach; for it can never be thought, that all the advantages of the christian under the gospel, will produce no salutary effects even in this life. In knowledge indeed, we can come to little perfection for the present; while our faculties are weak,

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our prejudices strong, and so many things about us apt to deceive. But still we may make some advances in knowledge, suitable to our abilities and circumstances, and, comparatively speaking, considerable ones. By a careful observation of the works of God, *the invisible things of him are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead.* And we may not only apprehend his existence and attributes, but we may also discover plainly by our relation to him, as his creatures, that rule and law of action that he hath given us, and engraven in our hearts. And by diligently searching the scriptures, in which is contained the whole revelation of God, we may understand the doctrines of our religion, so far as the knowledge of them can be proper and useful for us; we may perceive our duty as christians and believers, and the full force and meaning of all the precepts of the gospel for our practice. And this knowledge of God and our duty, as it may be daily increased and extended as far as our nature will allow, may be justly called something of perfection. And by repeated diligence, we may
go

go on to an higher degree of it than is SERM.
XII. commonly imagined. For though we cannot come to the knowledge that angels and superior beings are possessed of, we may attain to all that men can do in our present circumstances, in which the powers of our nature have been weakened through sin. While our souls are confined within these gross bodies, we can never expect to enjoy an equal degree of knowledge with the spirits of just men made perfect; who are freed from their weakness, and from all the inconvenience that arises from it. They have indeed, the highest perfection of human nature; the very summit of all their hopes, *when we shall no more see darkly as through a glass, but see God as he is, as the apostle expresseth it, and behold his glory.*

But though we cannot arrive at perfection in knowledge, we may succeed better in our practice. For there are some things which we may plainly attain to by the grace of God, and which taken together, may be considered as the gospel perfection. And in the

1. Place, one great mark or character of perfection which we may attain to,

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is

SERM. is a sincere love of God, and religion,
 XII. and virtue. We may love him as the
 most excellent Being, and the Author of
 all our happiness. For his goodness is
 a constant demand upon our love. This
 is the root and spring of all our duty, by
 which only we can be acceptable to him.
This is the first and great commandment,
says our Saviour, to love God with all our
heart, and with all our strength, and with
all our mind. Love is the fulfilling of the
law. Love to God and his ways, will
 be a strong principle within to move us
 to our duty. And hence, the apostle
 Jude exhorts believers to *keep themselves*
in the love of God, as the sure means to
 constrain them to their duty. It is true,
 we may not be able to rise to such a de-
 gree of the love of God, as becomes the
 excellency of his nature, and our obliga-
 tions to him as his creatures, but it may
 be sincere, and come from the inmost
 recesses of our souls; we may love him
 above all things, and allow of no rival
 in competition with him. We may de-
 light in him, and love to worship and
 serve him. And if we thus sincerely love
 him, we must also love religion and vir-
 tue, from the relation they have to him,
 as

as they bear his image, and are supported by his authority. For to say that we love God, and do not love religion and virtue, which are derived from him, and enjoined by him, is a plain contradiction: can we love God and not pay any regard to his institutions? This then is one great mark or character of christian perfection, that we sincerely love God, and religion, and virtue. In this we cannot be deceived; this we may feel within our own breasts. And this may always give us a comfortable reflection, if we are conscious to ourselves of it. *For if any man love God, the same is known of him, (as the apostle says). He means, he is regarded and acknowledged, and will be rewarded by him.*

2. And as we may thus attain to a sincere love of God, so we may have an universal charity and benevolence to all mankind. This, as the apostle calls it, is the *bond of perfectness*; the principle that ought to influence us in all our intercourse with men; the very genius and spirit of the gospel. By this, says our Saviour, *shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another.* And without this, all other attainments
are

S E R M. are nothing, so that though we under-
 XII. *stand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and should bestow all our goods to feed the poor, and give our body to be burned, as the apostle says, and have not charity, it profiteth us nothing.* And as we may thus attain to a general benevolence, so it is a farther degree of perfection, to be affected with a special regard for all good men, all the lovers of God and religion, especially those *of the household of faith.* This from the amiableness of the duty, the noble and generous sentiments that it inspires, and withal, the difficulty to attain to it, in some cases, may justly be called perfection. And still more justly, if we can so far subdue our passions, as, according to our Saviour's commandment, *to love our enemies, bless them that curse us, and pray for them that despitefully use us, and persecute us.* This universal benevolence is, I say, a degree of perfection which a serious christian may arrive at. For we may, by care, and a strict guard over our passions, cultivate this affection within us. We may excite ourselves to it, we may stifle all prejudices, and bring ourselves to benevolent thoughts, by examining mens actions with

with candour, and making all possible allowances for their weakness and circumstances. *For he that cannot love his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he* (says St. John) *love God whom he hath not seen?* Again,

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3. Another degree of perfection which christians may arrive at, is sincerity and honesty of mind, an uprightness of intention in all their conduct and actions. In scripture, this disposition is sometimes called perfection, to represent to us the value and importance of it. Thus the Psalmist says, ci. 2. *I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.* And of king Aza it is said, that notwithstanding his sinful failures, *his heart was perfect with the Lord all his days.* It is the same character our Saviour intends, Luke viii. in the parable of the sower, when he mentions, *those who in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, brought forth fruit with patience.* And in the description of Nathaniel, *behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile.* Such are those, whom he elsewhere calls *the pure in heart; blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* Nor is this character out of our reach, or beyond our present abilities;

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lities ; it is what all christians may attain to, it is only to be what they *appear* to be ; to be without guile, and to be candid in all their actions. Such a disposition is amiable and precious in itself, and it gives us assurance before him who knows the sincerity and honesty of our endeavours. *If our heart condemn us not*, says St. John, *then have we confidence towards God*. Integrity may justly be called perfection, as it qualifies all our actions, and denominates them good and commendable ; it will extenuate our failures and infirmities, and will plead for mercy and compassion. If then we are conscious to ourselves of the sincerity and honesty of our hearts, we may be assured, that we are advanced one step toward christian perfection. It is the beginning, or foundation of all religious and moral perfection, and it is an earnest that we shall at length come to the knowledge of the perfect man. For though we may sometimes fail in our endeavours, the sincerity of them will qualify the performance of our duty, in the sight of our benevolent and merciful Creator.

4. Another degree of perfection which christians may arrive at, is an habit and
faci-

facility, or pleasure in doing their duty, and being employed in the exercises of religion. And this is not easily to be attained. There must be time, and care, and anxiety, before we can arrive to it. Ill habits by degrees must be got the better of, prejudices must be conquered, and by frequent trials to perform our duty, we must at length come to do it in some measure, agreeable to our own inward reflections. And when men have got so far as to do their duty with ease and pleasure, what joy and satisfaction must they have in the ways of religion and virtue! They will then have their minds raised above all the little views of this world, above all the sordid pleasures of sin. The exercises of devotion will be highly agreeable to them, they will take delight, as the prophet Isaiah expresses it, *in approaching to God to know his ways*. The stated times of worship will be welcome to them, and they will have the same sentiments with the Psalmist, who must have had great pleasure in the religious institutions of his time, when he says, *O how amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts. My soul longeth, and even fainteth for the courts of the Lord.* To attain

S E R M.
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S E R M. tain to this disposition of mind is a great
 XII. degree of perfection, the very happiness
 and pleasure of the soul. And to be
 daily advancing in it, must be delightful
 to a mind conscious of its own progress
 in religion and virtue; when it feels
 within itself, that the path of the just is
*as the shining light, that shineth more and
 more until the perfect day.*

In the last place, another degree of
 perfection that christians may attain to,
 is a firmness and constancy of mind in
 the belief of the gospel; they will be wil-
 ling to hazard all, even life itself for the
 sake of it. This may be effected by a
 strong impression of the truths of religion
 on the mind, a lively view of the things
 of the other world, and the importance
 of our interest there. When the mind
 does not hesitate, but sees in a manner,
 the reality of all that is said and promised
 in the gospel, and when the hopes of
 glory and happiness in the other life
 overbalances all considerations in the
 present, such a degree of perfection we
 see has often been enjoyed by good men
 in the different ages of the world. Un-
 der the Old Testament, the prophets and
 many other worthies were so stedfast in
 their

their faith that they were stoned, were S E R M.
sawn afunder, were slain with the sword, XII.

and were tortured, not accepting deliverance, *that they might attain a better resurrection.* And since the publishing the gospel, we know that numbers of christians, both ancient and modern, have for the sake of their faith and a good conscience, submitted to the greatest hardships and miseries, and even torments and death. They took *joyfully*, the apostle says, *the spoiling of their goods, knowing that in heaven they had a better and an enduring substance.* These, I say, are examples of this degree of perfection, and shew us that it may be attained. And though we live in times when, thanks be to God, we are not likely to be put to such trials, yet every serious believer ought always to maintain in his mind the same temper and disposition, that if called to it, he may be able, as our Saviour expresses it, *to leave all, and take up his cross and follow him.*

And now, perhaps, it may be here enquired, whether any believer can attain to a sinless perfection in this life, so as to have no sinful failures. To which I think it may be justly answered, from
what

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what we find in the scriptures, and the experience of good men in all ages, that there is no such innocent perfection in this state of things. Under the Old Testament we see, that the greatest examples of piety, of whom we have any considerable account, were stained with infirmities, and often fell into very guilty excesses. And hence, the wisest of men, Solomon, who had well considered what was transacted before his time, hath observed, that there is not a *just man upon earth, who doeth good and sinneth not*. And even since the times of the gospel, when men had greater knowledge and advantages, we find the like sinful infirmities; we find some of the apostles themselves, often failing in their duty and falling into sin, Nor do we know of any character perfectly pure and holy, except the blessed Jesus, who from the innocency of his life was called the *Lamb of God*, and of whom it is said, *he did no evil, neither was guile found in his mouth*. All have erred, all have gone astray, or to use the words of the apostle, *all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*, Rom. iii. 23. So long as we are here, our frailty will attend us. It is only in
heaven

heaven that the believer shall attain to S E R M.
spotless purity, and shall be established XII.
above all the dangers of sin. Some indeed, there are of late, who, from an enthusiastic conceit of their high attainments in religion, have imagined, that they have arrived at a sinless perfection; and that it is possible for others so to do. But how can they persuade us of it? Are they better than the holy apostles and prophets? Have they accurately examined all their conduct, and severely watched over their thoughts; and does their heart never condemn them in any thing? I fear notwithstanding all their fair appearance and unblameable outside, they will never be able to stand the scrutiny, before a holy and omniscient God. Such would do well to remember the apostle's exhortation. *Be not high minded, but fear; and let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.*

And thus I have endeavoured to explain what the gospel perfection is; I have shewn how far perfection is attainable by us, and in what particulars it is to be attained. And now, from what has been said, let us all be exhorted to

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strive

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strive for it; that is to say, let us aim at that degree of innocence and purity in which we shall be accepted by our merciful Creator. This cannot be dispensed with, this we must attain to, as the welfare of our souls depends upon it for ever. If we mean to be among the *spirits of just men made perfect* hereafter, we must begin that perfection here. Our souls must begin to be rectified and purified from the stains of sin and corruption. We must have something of the temper and disposition of the heavenly kingdom. And though we cannot arrive at sinless perfection, we may have some similitude and resemblance to absolute purity. And if we earnestly endeavour for it, perhaps we may be able to go beyond our present expectation; for no man knows what he can do till he really makes the trial.

But if we have hitherto made any progress in religion and virtue, we must not rest there, and turn cool with regard to any farther attainment. For if we once do this, we shall soon fall backward: our former vicious habits will take hold on us while we are remiss and indifferent, and we shall then run the hazard of losing

losing ourselves for ever. On the contrary, we ought always to remember how much we are short and vastly below the perfection that becomes us as christians and believers. We see how much otherwise St. Paul was determined. *I count not myself, says he, to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those that are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ.*

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The perfection of our heavenly Father is the grand pattern we are to imitate; his moral attributes, his goodness, justice, and faithfulness, which are the original of all beauty and perfection. This, so far as our low and finite nature will allow, we are to copy after; and it is possible, we may attain to some likeness and proportion in our practice. The example of Christ we ought also to regard, as it is a perfect transcript of the divine goodness. It is a lively pattern, suited to our abilities and understanding, and designedly accommodated to our weakness and circumstances. For here we see our duty illustrated in many particulars; in works of

S E R M. charity and mercy, and upright inno-
 XII. cence, in the common occurrences of life.
 And if we seriously set this example be-
 fore us, to be the rule and guide of our
 actions, there is no doubt but we shall
 make some proficiency in the *christian*
perfection.

S E R M O N XIII.

On Judgment.

REVELATION XXII. 12.

Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be.

IN this chapter our Lord is represented, S E R M.
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as giving his last message by St. John, to the seven churches of Asia. In which he declares, that he will fulfil his promise which he had given while on earth, and come again in a glorious and awful manner, as the Judge of the world. And he invites mankind in a most affectionate manner, to accept of eternal life and salvation through him; *I Jesus, says he, have sent mine angel to testify those things unto you in the churches—and the Spirit and the bride say, come; and let him that heareth, say, come; and let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.* And he seems to express himself as if this was

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the last of the revelations of the gospel, and men were to expect no more from him till the time of his blessed appearance. But that they might not be disconsolate under this circumstance, he tells them, in the words of the text, that he would not only come again, but that he would *come quickly*, and that his *reward is with him*. *Behold, I come quickly*, says he, *and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be*.

In which we may observe, first, the solemn promise, that he will *come quickly*; and then, the awful declaration of the business and purpose of his coming; that his *reward is with him, to give to every man as his work shall be*. *Behold*, says he, *I come quickly*. The meaning is, that he will make no unnecessary delay; that he will come as soon as the scheme of providence, determined by the wisdom of God in the government of the world, shall be accomplished. To come sooner would be to come precipitately, and not quickly; for there is a certain scheme of events to be brought about in the moral world, and there is a determined number of men in their several generations, that are to be brought into being, to whom the

the offers of salvation and happiness are to be made, before his coming can be necessary or proper, that the kingdom of God may be established in that extent which his goodness and wisdom has appointed. *Known unto God are all his works from the beginning.* And this seems to be farther implied, in what is added as the business of his coming, *my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be.* For if there is a distribution to be made according to the deserts of every individual, there must be a space of time allowed for the trial of every one in his several generation, when he had his opportunity and liberty to approve himself. The expression, *my reward is with me*, is very remarkable, as it gives us an awful intimation, that this life is a state of probation, that an account must be given of our conduct, that it will bring the most important consequences upon us in another state of things, and that, to excite us to exert ourselves, a reward is proposed, for which we are to labour. As in common life, rewards are supposed to work upon the passions of men, to excite their industry and determine their conduct, so in the gospel,

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S E R M. to stir men up to the practice of religion
XIII. and virtue, there is a reward offered
hereafter, sufficiently to compensate all
the labour, difficulties, and hazard, that
they may possibly undergo in their duty.
For such is the goodness of God, that he
does not desire the performance of what
he requires of us, without making our
own interest and happiness highly con-
cerned in it. Now this promised reward,
which our Lord brings with him, is
often described in the New Testament to
be eternal life, a heavenly kingdom,
glory, and consummate happiness, and a
rest from all the uneasiness in this state
of things; and it is said to be provided
for them, who patiently continue in well-
doing. And on the contrary, to them
that obey not the truth, but obey un-
righteousness, the wicked, obstinate, and
impenitent sinner, the reward will be in-
dignation and wrath, misery and ever-
lasting destruction, in an unhappy and
desperate state, *where their worm dieth
not, and the fire is not quenched.* And it
is here declared, that it shall be given to
every man according as his work shall be;
that is, that the happiness and blessing
arising from it to good men, shall be in
proportion

proportion to the several degrees of their S E R M.
 virtue and goodness, and according to XIII.
 the opportunities they had enjoyed, all
 reasonable allowances being made for
 their weakness and circumstances. And
 on the other hand, that severity shall be
 used in a proportionate distribution, ac-
 cording to the several degrees of obsti-
 nacy, vice, and wickedness of the sinner.
*The servant that knew his Lord's will, and
 prepared not himself, neither did according
 to his will, shall be beaten, as our Saviour
 says, with many stripes; but he that knew
 not, and did commit things worthy of stripes,
 shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto
 whom much is given, of him shall much be
 required.*

In the following discourse, I shall

I. Endeavour farther to represent to
 you, the circumstances and purpose
 of our Saviour's second coming.
 And then

II. Vindicate the reasonableness of this
 declaration, *that his reward is with
 him, to give to every one as his work
 shall be.* I am

I. To represent to you, the circum-
 stances and purpose of our Lord's coming
 again.

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again. When our Saviour first came into the world for the redemption of mankind, to recover them from that misery and destruction in which they were involved by sin, he appeared in a low humble manner, without any thing of grandeur and pomp; he was even *despised and rejected of men*, while he was a teacher of righteousness, discovering the will of God to them, and the method of their salvation, and inviting them to repent, and accept of eternal life and happiness. And the reason of his appearing in this humble and afflicted manner was, not only that he might accommodate his life, so that he might be made a sacrifice for sin, and shew us an example in the practice of virtue, suitable to the circumstances of all men, even in the lowest condition; but also that he might make the evidences of his divine mission stronger, by taking away all suspicion and objections, that might arise from the exercise of worldly power and grandeur. He shewed that his kingdom was not of this world, that the riches and honours of it were below his regard; that his kingdom was to be *a spiritual kingdom in the hearts of men*; that the dominion he sought

sought was to govern them in righteousness, and to instruct them in virtue and goodness, in their duty to God and one another, and to prepare them to be proper subjects of an eternal kingdom of glory.

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Now when our Lord had finished this business here on earth, and done all that was necessary for the salvation of mankind, having sown the seeds of righteousness and truth, he left this world, till the various purposes of providence should in time be accomplished: till the seed sown should spring up, and come to maturity, and the fruits should be ready to be gathered; at which time it must be necessary for him to come again to receive the increase, and to judge of the improvements of every individual. Thus our Saviour himself represents it, in the parable of the tares of the field, Matt. xiii. and in that of the talents in the xxvth of St. Matthew.

But at his second coming, as the circumstances of things then require, he will appear in a very different manner, in an exalted and glorious state, with all the majesty that is suitable to his nature and character. He will then come as the Judge of the world, appointed by
the

S E R M. the Father to pass a righteous sentence
 XIII. on the ungodly, and to receive into the
 joys of his eternal kingdom all those
 who have obeyed the gospel, all the
 lovers of truth and righteousness, that
 ever have existed. His appearance then
 will be the very reverse of what it for-
 merly was; it will be with infinite ho-
 nour and dignity; all power in heaven
 and earth being given unto him, and all
 his enemies trembling before him. Thus
 he himself describes it, *when the Son of
 man shall come in his glory, and all the holy
 angels with him, then shall he sit upon the
 throne of glory, and before him all na-
 tions shall be gathered, and he shall separate
 them one from another. And these, viz. the
 wicked, shall go away into everlasting pu-
 nishment, but the righteous into life eternal,*
 Matt. xxv. *Then shall the dead hear the
 voice of the Son of God, and they that hear
 shall live,* John v. 25.

This is the grand event foretold by
 the prophets, declared in the gospel, and
 expected by all christians. An event
 which will for ever confirm the happi-
 ness of the good and virtuous, and as-
 certain the misery of the wicked and im-
 penitent; which will make an eternal
 distinction

distinction between him *who has served* SERM.
God, and him who has served him not. XIII.

Then, to use the words of the apostle, *shall be the restitution of all things*; when the whole system of moral agency in this lower world shall be rectified, when death and sin shall be vanquished, and the moral creation again restored to its original beauty and order. Then shall begin the everlasting ages of eternity, when the purposes of God concerning this earth shall be finished, and his saints shall be established in his kingdom of glory, there eternally to reign with him; when the administration of Christ, as our redeemer, shall be accomplished, and he shall give up the kingdom to *the Father, that God may be all in all.*

And as the coming of Christ is thus the most awful and important event, so we are told in the New Testament, that it shall be accompanied with great changes in the natural world, as if all nature were to be dissolved and new formed, to add to the solemnity of the great transactions of that day. *The heavens, says St. Peter, 2 Ep. iii. being on fire shall be dissolved, and pass away with a great noise—the earth also, and the works that*

SERM. *that are therein shall be burnt up.* Not
 XIII. that we are to imagine, that the planetary heavens, or the earth, this beautiful part of the creation, shall be totally dissipated and annihilated; but only rectified and refined, and perhaps, cast into a new form proper for the eternal uses of the great Creator: or possibly, they will be made mansions for the souls of all the lovers of truth and righteousness; when they are again united with their new bodies, to enjoy everlasting happiness. It is true, that at present we see no other probability of this grand event, than that which the scriptures give us; for all things seem to continue as they were from the beginning of the creation, and appear to be governed by the natural course of things. But here is no difficulty with regard to the credibility of the fact, for we often see, and have heard how the greatest things come to pass, as it were in a moment of time; the most improbable things have been often brought about in an instant, by some catastrophe of nature, as an earthquake, thunder, and the like. And for the same reason, the greatest revolution of nature, such as this described in the scripture, may be brought

brought about by an almighty power, S E R M. XIII.
 without any previous warning or appearance. For he that hath all the powers of nature at his command, may by his word *call the things that are not, as though they were.* As at first, things were called into being in a moment by omnipotence, so by the same, they may be as suddenly changed or destroyed.

And thus, having mentioned briefly the circumstances and purpose of our Saviour's coming, let us now in the

II. Place, besides the authority of the gospel revelation, endeavour to shew the reasonableness of this declaration in the text, which promises a judgment to come, when *a reward shall be given to every man, according as his work shall be.* And this will appear evident, if we consider the nature of man in his present sinful and imperfect state. That man is a reasonable creature, and capable of giving account of his behaviour; that he can discern between good and evil, and know his duty in many particulars, and that he has a freedom and choice in his actions, will easily be allowed. There is a law, or rule of action, as it were, written

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ten within him, that is obvious to him upon his reflection, and that directs him to the practice of what is right and wrong. And if so, it must follow, that there ought to be some strong obligation upon him to govern himself by it, or to act according to his reasonable nature. For a law, is no law if it does not oblige men to the observance of it, by a sanction of rewards and punishment. Men must be influenced by some weighty motives, to act always as their duty requires of them; because, though they have reason to direct them, and may often see what is fit and right for them to do, yet the dictates of reason are slow and cold, and often ill attended to. The intrinsic goodness and propriety of an action is not always, though it ought to be, a sufficient motive to stir up men to exert themselves. The mind is often diverted and drawn aside, by the number and false appearances of other objects that intrude themselves. And therefore, to determine men more effectually, the passions must be applied to; their hopes and fears must be worked upon, some great good must be set before them to allure them; or some important evil to be avoided, to oblige

oblige them to a proper conduct. For S E R M.
XIII.
the foundation of all government, consists in a proper distribution of rewards and punishment. And hence, to excite men to the practice of religion and virtue, it was reasonable that the supreme Governor of the world should propose some great and lasting degree of happiness as a reward, and some intense degree of misery as a punishment. And this the nature of things seemed to require; that religion and virtue should be supported by him who hath *all power and knowledge*, and could discern their true symptoms and efficacy, and before whom all things are naked and open. And without such a revelation of the will of God, men, who are often heedless, and by habit strongly biased to their vices, could not be so effectually excited to their duty.

The practice of religion and virtue is indeed in itself amiable; it gives great satisfaction to the mind, and ought to be embraced for its own sake, without any view of an interest hereafter. And if all men had a superior degree of knowledge and perfection, if their faculties were stronger, and the inclination to their

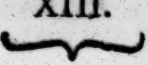
S E R M.
XIII.

vices weaker, they might be induced to the constant practice of what is fit and reasonable, without being compelled by the force of rewards and punishment; and this would be to act in a more noble and exalted way. But in the present situation of mankind, when reason is often weak and the passions so strong, when the pleasure that arises from virtue and goodness is scarce ever sufficiently perceived, and the evil that results from vice disregarded; men must be drawn to their duty by the consideration of a superior interest, which will have more actual force upon their minds. And to determine them in this manner, is plainly agreeable to all our notions of the goodness and the wisdom of God.

If again we consider the present appearance of things, that there is in this life no plain and visible favour of providence to the good and virtuous, more than to the vicious and profane, that there is no constant happiness annexed to religion and virtue, nor any certain misery or punishment attending on vice; it seems to be reasonable, that the Governor of the world should make some declaration of an equitable distribution of things

things hereafter. And without such a S E R M. XIII. declaration, the present scene of things seems to be inexplicable. For no man *knows either love or hatred by all that is before him. All things come alike unto all, says Solomon; there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked, to him that sacrificeth and to him that sacrificeth not; as is the good, so is the sinner.* The fit and equitable state of things is so reversed in this world, that the good and virtuous are often unfortunate and in distress, while the vicious are successful and triumphant. And though good men may sometimes have pleasure in the practice of their virtue, this satisfaction is so often interrupted by an unhappy situation, and vice so advantageously placed and prosperous, that it may be justly said, that goodness has no evident reward, nor vice any adequate punishment here.

If then there is no visible reward to virtue and goodness in this life, nor constant and sufficient punishment to vice, and yet the nature of men requires that distinction according to their respective behaviour, it seems highly reasonable, that at least this should be proposed

S E R M. in the life to come : from which there
XIII.  may be a certain view of an infinite interest hereafter, which may fully overbalance all the enticements to sin and wickedness now. This the goodness and justice of God, and his affection to his own creatures, as the Parent and Governor of the world, seems to require of him. And without some such provision hereafter, some compensation to the good and upright for their unhappiness here, and punishment to obstinate offenders, to balance their success in this state of things, it is impossible to give any tolerable account of the moral attributes of God, or his relation to us as his rational creatures. For how can the justice of God be defended or accounted for, if there are plain cases, as it is certain there are, in which innocence and virtue have met with oppression and misery ? and on the contrary, villainy and wickedness been successful and flourishing ? What idea can we have of his equity, if he will never abase the pride of tyranny, and check the rage of persecution, nor ever make any retribution ? How can his goodness be vindicated, or how can he be said to regard reli-

religion and virtue, if, in some cases, he suffers good men to be, upon the whole, miserable, and not through their own fault, but by an inevitably unfortunate disposition of things? And what shall we think of the wisdom of his government, if he shall permit vice and wickedness to prevail, and go on in a continued succession, without any punishment for the violation of his laws?

I may add moreover, that the reasonableness of this declaration of our Saviour is evident from hence, that without the view of rewards and punishment in a future existence, human society cannot subsist. For without this, nothing can constrain men effectually to a moral behaviour. There could be no security for life and property, nothing to oblige them in their interior and secret conduct. And if so, can it be possible, that the very being and happiness of mankind must depend upon a falsehood? Can God have so formed the human nature, that the good of society must be supported by a fiction. This were to give us a notion of him as weak and immoral; weak, if he could do no otherwise, and immoral, if he would not. It

S E R M. seems rather to be evident, that as our
 XIII. social happiness cannot subsist without
 this view of an hereafter, that therefore
 it must be just and agreeable to the in-
 tention of providence. Nor can this be
 denied, unless we admit a plain absur-
 dity, namely, that God has made our
 nature inconsistent with itself, and the
 truth of things; which is in effect, to
 deny his wisdom and moral character.

In the last place, it may be said, that as
 a judgment to come solves all the diffi-
 culties and seeming inconsistencies in the
 conduct of providence in this world, it
 must therefore certainly be true. It is
 acknowledged for a rule among all phi-
 losophical men, that in any case, the hy-
 pothesis that solves all the appearances
 must undoubtedly be the true one. And
 without admitting this rule, no cause
 can be assigned for any natural effect.
 Now if it is allowed, that there shall be
 a just distribution hereafter, then all the
 errors and darkness that appear in the
 moral system do instantly vanish, and we
 can then clearly see how things are con-
 nected here and hereafter. Then we
 can see why sentence is not speedily exe-
 cuted against the vicious and profane,
 and

and why the wicked are suffered to rage S E R M.
and prosper. And on the other hand, XIII.
how is it consistent with the goodness of
God, that the religious and virtuous
should often meet with discouragements
and distress in this life? Because if there
is a just retribution hereafter, the joy
and prosperity of the wicked is but short,
it will soon be terminated by the unhap-
piness of a miserable state, in conse-
quence of a righteous judgment. And
on the contrary, good men shall have a
full compensation for all their troubles
and uneasiness here: eternal joy and fe-
licity will absorb the very remembrance
of all their afflictions and difficulties,
and it will be seen that they were of very
little importance to the sum of happiness,
in the whole of their being. But on the
other hand, without supposing a judg-
ment to come, it is impossible to give
any tolerable account of things; we shall
never be able to reconcile the moral ap-
pearance to any principle than that of
downright atheism. No other hypothe-
sis, without this view hereafter, can ever
solve the difficulties. There is nothing
but confusion and absurdity in the whole

SERM, moral system, nor any comfort and satisfaction to a virtuous mind.

XIII.

Thus having considered what I proposed, it can be scarce necessary for me to add, that it becomes us all seriously to reflect on the importance of the subject. For if this is certain, that Christ will *come again quickly, and that his reward is with him, to give to every man as his work shall be*, then we see of what consequence our conduct now is to our eternal welfare. If we go on in the way of righteousness and truth, if we fear God and serve him faithfully, and abstain from the vices and pollutions of the world about us, we have a joyful expectation of happiness to eternity. But if we persevere in a vicious course, if we forget God and disregard religion, if we plunge ourselves into the debauchery and corruption of the world about us, we may justly look for the terrible reward of indignation, wrath, and eternal remorse. God has set before us everlasting life and glory on the one hand, and misery and despair, in an unhappy state, on the other; therefore let us determine for ourselves in a rational manner, that upon the review of our life we may have peace,
and

and find mercy at the coming of our Lord. Let us always remember, that though the solemn appearance of Christ at the end of the world may possibly be after some distant ages, yet every man's death fixes his own eternal condition, and is to him in all purposes the very same thing, as the coming of our Lord to judgment. Every man's departure from life, is to him the same as the end of the world; for there is then no farther state of probation, no more place for repentance, no more opportunity of performing any part of the work of his salvation; he will remain in an unchangeable state, and the soul be appointed to its particular mansion, either of comfort or sorrow; waiting for that awful day, when *all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live.* May we then prepare ourselves, that the day of our own particular call unto judgment may not surprise us unprovided; amidst all our interests, amusements, and gaiety in this world, let us still bear uppermost in our minds this solemn declaration of our Lord, *Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be.*

S E R M.
XIII.

S E R-

and had many at the coming of our Lord. Let us always remember, that though the coming of Christ at the end of the world may possibly be after some instant ages yet every man's death fixes his eternal condition, and is to him in all respects the very same thing, as the coming of our Lord to judgment. Every man's departing from life, is to him the same as the end of the world; for there is then no farther state of probation, no more place for repentance, no more opportunity of performing any part of the work of his salvation; he will remain in an unchangeable state, and the soul be appointed to its particular mansion, either of comfort or sorrow; waiting for that awful day, when all that are in the graves shall rise, the Son of God, and they that have fallen here. May we then prepare ourselves, that the day of our own departing will come; judgment may not be as we are unprovided; amidst all our iniquities, lamentations, and griefs in this world, let us still be appointed in our minds to the declaration of our Lord. Blessed I am, and my reward is mine, as I am to every man according as he has done.

S E R M O N XIV.

God alone sufficient for our Happiness.

HABAKKUK III. 17, 18.

Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

THESE words express the resolution of a good man, amidst the various changes and misfortunes of the present life. The prophet had been in the former part of the chapter meditating on the majesty, power, and goodness of God; and that sublime subject naturally filled him with the most awful notions, but it gave at the same time, pleasure and comfort to his mind, to recollect that the attributes of God were not unactive, indolent properties, but

S E R M.
XIV

S E R M. but that they were employed for the happiness of the good and virtuous. He describes these perfections in a lofty and amiable manner, which shews that his mind was raised to the contemplation of the divine Being as the fountain of his happiness. He saw that what was wanting in the creatures, was to be found in the highest perfection in God; and that he was an inexhaustible source of good. He saw that God was the only sure and rational ground of true felicity, and that all other objects of dependence were vain, uncertain, and insufficient. And in this view of things, he comes in the words which I have read, to renounce all hopes of satisfaction in the creatures, all confidence in any imperfect being, and firmly to resolve, amidst all revolutions and disappointments, or troubles that might happen to him in this world, to put his trust, and seek his happiness in God alone. *Although, says he, the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, and the flock be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stall; yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.*

He

He makes a supposition of the greatest S E R M.
XIV.
disappointments and hardships he could possibly meet with, in which he instances those sensible things that are very comfortable; and especially requisite for the support of common life; other things being inconsiderable and trifling, when compared to them. And by these few important particulars, he mentions he would, no doubt, have us to understand in general, the whole of the comforts of life; whatsoever things without him tended to his ease and pleasure, or to the inward peace and satisfaction of his mind. By which he means to express, in the strongest manner, his resolution of disregarding any disappointment or loss in this world, while he could be secure of the divine favour and goodness towards him. As if he had said, although all those things that are grateful to my senses, all that are delightful to me, or even those most necessary comforts of life which support my being, should be withdrawn from me, and though all things should happen contrary to my wishes and expectation, yea, though universal nature should fail me, *yet will I rejoice*

SERM. *rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of*
 XIV. *my salvation.*

The word here translated *rejoice*, signifies such a degree of joy and pleasure as prompts a man to exult or leap for joy, and then the expression implies something to this purpose; I will be so far from being miserable in this supposed condition, that I will be highly joyful in God; whose infinite attributes can supply the want of all created things, and render me happy amidst all the misfortunes and miseries of the world. And that he might farther express himself fully satisfied with this happiness that results from the favour of God, he adds, *I will joy in the God of my salvation*; he means, that though he was possessed of no temporal things, he would make himself glad in relying upon God, who could easily deliver him from all hardships and difficulties, and at length render him absolutely happy for ever.

In the following discourse, I shall endeavour to represent to you the reasonableness of this good resolution of the prophet, by shewing

I. That

I. That our happiness in this world is very imperfect and uncertain, and always unequal to our desires and expectations. And then

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II. That God only, by reason of his infinite attributes, is sufficient for our happiness. As to the

I. That our happiness in this world is very imperfect and uncertain, and unequal to our desires and expectations, is but too evident from our experience.

We are brought into this world in a manner which moves the compassion of every beholder. And we spend a great part of our time in that situation, helpless, weak, and ignorant. In the first beginnings of life, no creatures are in a more forlorn condition; and we continue longer in it before we are able to provide for ourselves than any other animals whatever, in proportion to the whole period of their being. And all this time is, for the most part, lost without any rational reflections, but often indeed made unhappy, with peculiar diseases and accidents, that affect us in that tender state. So true is the observation of
the

SERM. the observation of the wise man, *that*
 XIV. *childhood and youth are vanity.* When we
 advance farther, and begin to act our
 part in life, we have then indeed, more
 reason and understanding, more strength
 and vigour, but our cares and anxieties
 increase upon us. We find often diffi-
 culties and hardships that depress us, and
 we must endure labour and toil in order
 to succeed so far, as to get a tolerable
 subsistence or provision for our natural
 necessities. If we refuse to labour and
 submit to the yoke, we are sure to fall
 into misery; to want the supplies of our
 nature, and to be surrounded with dis-
 tresses of every kind. And even if we do
 our duty, and act a wise and reasonable
 part, such is the disposition of things by
 providence, that this will not always se-
 cure us from accidents and inconveni-
 encies that may render us uneasy or un-
 happy. Or if we are prosperous, and
 imagine ourselves in a happy situation,
 while we are busied and hurried in the
 employments of life, it soon comes to a
 period, and old age and infirmities haf-
 ten upon us. A few years will soon ter-
 minate all amusements and pleasures, all
 the views and expectations which we can
 possibly

possibly have here. Our life, as St. James S E R M. XIV. expresses it, *is as a vapour that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away; or in the words of the Psalmist, the days of man are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes; for the wind passes over it and it is gone, and the place thereof shall know it no more.*

But ever in this life, short as it is, the frame of our nature, and the constitution of things is such, that we can never be intirely happy. We find our bodies exposed to many inconveniencies, unarmed, and unable to keep us from the dangers that surround us, however beautiful and wisely contrived they may be for our manner of living upon earth, they lay us open to many evils and troubles. How frail and slender are the vessels and fibres within us, and how easily vitiated and corrupted are the fluids and juices of our bodies! The least violence or disorder brings pain and uneasiness, and by engaging all our thoughts, bereaves us of other enjoyments. And frequently, when we are proposing to ourselves a long possession of health and vigour, we are seized with sudden diseases and rack-
ing pains; or if they are more tolerable,

T

yet

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yet how often is our whole life made uneasy by them, and man rendered a burden to himself! Every day we are in danger of a dissolution of our nature, either from some deficiency within, or some misfortune without us.

And as for our minds, which seem to be more under our own power and management, and from the peace of which we might expect some degree of happiness, they are frequently disturbed and dissatisfied. The discouragements and difficulties we meet with, affect our tempers and sink the spirits. At other times, when there is nothing immediately without to discontent us, we are disquieted within, while our thoughts run eagerly upon projects and schemes of happiness, which in the end miserably disappoint us. We vex ourselves with anxious thoughts about futurity, and we are still fearful of some distant danger which may ruin us, and frustrate all our hopes. Or when we are in a more sedate state of mind, and would propose to ourselves any pleasure or happiness in any kind of speculation, in the searching after truth, and discovering the relations of things, even then we as often meet with disappointment,

pointment, and our success falls short of S E R M.
our expectation; we lose ourselves in an XIV.
endless labyrinth; and instead of advancing our knowledge, find our doubts and scruples increased; and are often so perplexed with variety of opinions, that we know not to which side to turn. A mist hangs round about us and intercepts our views, so that we can only make a doubtful guess at truth; and after all our labour and toil, are often obliged to sit down and bewail our ignorance, and the loss of the pleasure and satisfaction which we sought after. So true is the observation of Solomon, *he that would increase in knowledge, increaseth sorrow.* Sometimes again, a constitutional gloom falls upon us, and we have uneasy and pitiful thoughts, though we are not able to account for them, in our sereneest intervals. And at other times, guilty apprehensions, or reflections on the actions of our past life, alarm us and fill us with horror and amazement, with a *fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation to consume us*, as the apostle expresses it. And thus from the make and circumstances of our own nature, our happi-

S E R M. *ness here is very imperfect and uncer-*
 XIV. *tain.*

And as to the things of this world, which are without us, they are vain, and have nothing in them that can satisfy the desires of our souls. Though we seek after happiness in the delights which the world affords, yet our minds cannot rest in the enjoyment of them, and we are ever desirous of attaining something more than what is really to be found in them. They do not answer our imagination, and their utmost perfection comes vastly short of our wishes. However good and perfect the creatures may be, with respect to the end for which they were made, they are yet insufficient for our happiness. They contain in them nothing but a shadow, or an appearance of that true and substantial good which our minds wish for. They do not continue unalterable in any state; they are of a transitory nature, constantly upon the change, unsettled, and fluctuating in every circumstance. And though they were less changeable while they last, yet at the very best they are of a short continuance, and prone to decay and perish. That imaginary good in them,
 which

which we so earnestly pursue, and which SERM.
XIV. appears delightful to us, loses its beauty by degrees, and in the end wholly fades and vanishes. And besides all this chance of being disappointed in our expectation of happiness from them, they often procure us anxiety and grief, and fill our mouths with bitter things, instead of those delicious comforts which we promise ourselves from them.

And thus it appears, how liable we are to innumerable evils ; how little satisfaction there is in any thing here ; and that from the constitution of things, man is of course born unto trouble. But from all this we are by no means to arraign or find fault with the divine providence, which hath established such an arrangement of things. God is just and holy in all his works, and they are wise reasons, though we cannot comprehend them, why he has thus framed us, and made our happiness so very defective. He has undoubtedly a right to communicate it to his creatures in what degree he pleases, and we have always a greater share than we deserve. God never intended that this state should be the summit of our happiness ; else it is reasonable to think

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he would have made it more perfect, and secured it more effectually from the evils we feel. He seems rather, by the disposition of things, to be willing to raise our thoughts and affections higher, beyond this life, that we, seeing the vanity of all things here, may earnestly seek that satisfaction and security, which is only to be found in his favour and protection. Here then, when all nature fails us, when we see that happiness is not to be had from the creatures, and when we can find nothing certain and unchangeable to depend upon, let us look unto him that formed us, and contemplate the perfection of his nature, who can easily give us relief from all our difficulties, and fully supply all our wants. And this now leads me to the

II. Thing proposed, to shew, that God only, by reason of his infinite attributes, is sufficient for our felicity. For in the

I. Place, God is sufficient for our utmost desires. Let us mention some particulars: Do we want power to interpose for us? he is in infinite in power to compleat our happiness. He can remove the
obstacles

obstacles and impediments, and compass S E R M.
every thing that we can imagine for our XIV.
good. Nothing is impossible to him that
is not contradictory; is any *thing too hard*
for the Lord? says he to Abraham. As
all things were made by him, his uncon-
troulable power can produce all the com-
forts we wish for, and provide for us in
every condition. He can defend us from
all mischief and danger, and secure us
from every thing that may be trouble-
some and destructive. When we are in-
volved in the deepest trouble, and sur-
rounded with difficulties on every side,
his almighty arm can bring salvation to
us, and deliver us from all our fears.
When nothing in the world can give us
relief, we may entirely rely upon God,
and depend upon his omnipotence for
our supply.

Again, do we want wisdom and know-
ledge to direct us? in these God is infi-
nite. He knows all the possibilities and
various combinations of things; he sees
them distinctly, in whatever way they
may be involved together. He knows
all the powers of nature, and what can
be produced from them; he is thoroughly
acquainted with our frame, and discerns

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he knows what happiness it is that is suitable to us, and what is truly for our good ; and he understands how to order things, and connect them together for our advantage, though in a long and intricate chain of events. He can never be mistaken in the application of things, nor can he be surpris'd with any danger or loss that may happen, and therefore he can foresee and provide for our safety. He hath all wisdom and counsel, and is infallible in his designs and operations ; and whatever schemes he lays for our happiness, we cannot but be assured of their success. If we are secure of his wisdom to assist us, we need not be afraid of the cunning and artful designs of the men of the world ; we may safely rejoice in God, who can easily counterplot and undermine the projects of our most subtil enemies, and turn them into foolishness ; *for all the wisdom of the world is but foolishness with God.*

But farther, do we desire such a being to be every where, and for ever with us ? God is every where present, and he fills heaven and earth, and is to be found in every corner of the universe. In what-
ever

ever place we may wander, in whatso-
ever dismal abode we may be confined,

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though we be secluded from the company of mortals, and suffer where there is no eye to pity us, we shall find that God is with us, and a present help in our trouble. *Whither shall I go from thy spirit, says the Psalmist, or flee from thy presence? If I ascend into heaven thou art there; or make my bed in hell thou art there; or dwell in the outmost part of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me; or if I say, surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me.* Nothing can keep us from him, and by our fellowship and communion with him, we may have the loss of all other things supplied. When we cry unto him he is ever present to hear us, and to grant us a speedy answer; to relieve us from the evils that afflict us, and to set us in safety from him that puffeth at us, as the Psalmist says; nothing but sin and wickedness can separate us, or keep us from having constant and free access unto God. But

2. God is not only able, but he is also perfectly willing to communicate happiness to his creatures. For it could be no
great

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great comfort to us that he has power to render us happy, if he were not also benevolent, and ready to act for us. It is his goodness that makes his other perfections amiable, and that can give quiet and security to the mind of man. *He is good unto all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.* Such is his goodness, that he desires our happiness, and liberally affords us the means of it. And from the many effects of his goodness in the universe, we may see, that he is never inclinable to bring hardships or misery upon us, but for the most just and necessary reasons, such as effect his glory, and the order and government of his reasonable creatures. When we have offended him and obstinately rebelled against him, he is long-suffering and gracious; does not speedily execute his judgments upon us, but compassionately waits for our repentance. He takes no pleasure in the death and destruction of the wicked, but is mercifully willing that they should rather turn from their wickedness and live.

3. And in the last place, do we desire that such a being should exist with us for ever? God is eternal and unchangeable,
and

and therefore the happiness that results from his favour can never fail. If we could suppose any time in which he did not exist, or in which he might be subject to change, or variable, this indeed would lessen our hopes of happiness from him. For to be in the happiest state, and to have apprehensions that it will come to an end, though at the most distant time, would greatly diminish our satisfaction in the present enjoyments. Such is the nature of our souls, that we can never be fully contented with any thing that is not for ever. Eternity can only fill the mind; and we can never be truly happy, but when we can extend our views through its endless ages. Now God is an eternal fountain of happiness, he lives for ever; and of the pleasures and joys that are at his right-hand, there will be no end. All nature may come to a period and sink into nothing, or the present laws of the universe may change, but God is the same for ever. *The heavens, says the Psalmist, shall wax old as a garment, and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up; but thou shalt endure, and of thy years shall there be no end.*

And

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And thus from the whole, it appears, that true and lasting happiness is only to be found in the favour of God; that he can supply the good which we seek in vain in created things, and that he only is sufficient for all our wants and the vast desires of our souls. And therefore, nothing can be more reasonable than this good resolution of the prophet in the text, to place, and seek our happiness in him alone, *to rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of our salvation.*

S E R M O N XV.

On Humility.

I P E T E R V. 5.

Be clothed with humility ; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

THAT great variety of moral S E R M.
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precepts which is to be found in the scriptures, gives us the most exalted view of what ought to be the character and practice of a christian. For the gospel not only directs us in the knowledge and duties of religion, but it also imparts the most excellent rules and amiable sentiments of virtue. Thus in the text, we have one virtue, that of *humility*, strongly recommended to us ; which tends to perfect and adorn our nature, and which, if it was duly regarded, would greatly increase our social happiness. It is indeed, seldom taken notice of by the ancient heathen sages in their moral writings, being very opposite to their pride and corrupted passions ; but nevertheless,

SERM. theless, it is highly reasonable and be-
 XV. coming in our present low and imperfect
 state. And it may be considered as one
 of those many instances, in which the
 gospel has improved and perfected mo-
 rality.

The apostle Peter, in the verses im-
 mediately preceding, had been exhorting
 the rulers of the church, not to behave
 themselves as lords over God's heritage;
 that is, with lordly pride and rigorous
 dominion; but to be examples of the
 flock, by a moderate and reasonable de-
 portment, that in the end they might
 receive the reward promised, *a crown
 that fadeth not away*. And then he adds,
*likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto
 the elder*; he means not only on account
 of the propriety and decency of the
 thing, but also because of their supposed
 greater knowledge and experience in life;
*yea, all of you, says he, be subject one to ano-
 ther*; by which he enjoins them to bear
 with another, and to make great allow-
 ance for the temper and passions of others,
 which was the way to make themselves
 easy in their own situation. And then he
 sums up, and comprehends all those par-
 ticulars in the words of the text; *be clothed
 with*

with humility, for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. SERM.
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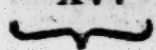
To be clothed with any thing, is an usual metaphor in speaking of any moral qualification or endowment of the mind. So we read in the scriptures, Psal. xxxv. 26. *of being clothed with shame.* Psal. xciii. *clothed with majesty.* Psal. civ. *clothed with honour.* And Isaiah vi. 10. *with the garments of salvation.* The word in the original, signifies to be clothed in a low and servile manner ; by which the apostle insinuates, that we ought to have a low opinion of ourselves, and our situation in life. And then he adds the strongest reason for humility, because *God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble* ; that is, God so ordereth things by his providence, that the proud are often opposed and resisted in their schemes, or by some misfortunes and judgments upon them, their loftiness is often brought down. But he *gives grace to the humble* ; he means, that providence frequently favours them, assists and blesses them, and that they gain the esteem and affection of men.

The words of the text being thus a little explained, will give us occasion

I. To

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I. To enquire what humility is

II. To shew the reasonableness of it.
And thenIII. To consider particularly, the argument for it, *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.*

I. Then let us enquire *what humility is*. And in general, it is a low opinion of ourselves, of our actions and abilities, with a suitable behaviour, consistently with truth. And this ought to arise from a consciousness of our own weakness and imperfection. For the high and unreasonable opinion men commonly have of themselves, arises from their not knowing themselves, and not considering their own infirmities; not that we are to have a lower opinion of ourselves than what in reason we ought to have, and what the truth of the case allows us; for this is rather a dejection of mind, than true humility; and there is no merit in thinking ourselves worse than we really are. Men, by reflection, may easily see what notion they ought to have of themselves, consistently with truth. A person may be sensible of his
qua-

qualifications, that he has more know-
ledge, more capacity, and that he be-
haves better in his station than certain
other men. And a man skilful in any
art or profession, must know, that in
that particular he is superior to others,
who have not been so active and diligent
as he has been. And in many cases we
cannot help knowing, that we have some
good qualities, or degrees of good qua-
lities, which others have not. True hu-
mility supposes that we know ourselves;
and also our rank and character in life;
and unless we act consistently with this
knowledge of ourselves, we shall in many
cases appear absurd and ridiculous. There
is a dignity of character that men are to
maintain, according to their rank and
eminence in life, and they are not to act
below this from any humble opinion of
themselves. If a governor, or person in
authority, were to act as a mean servant,
he would degrade his office and make
himself contemptible. And to a person in
some stations there are many things im-
proper to be done, which might well suit
those in a lower situation. The true no-
tion then of humility, is to have a low
opinion of ourselves, being conscious of

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our

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S E R M. our infirmities and imperfections; but so
XV. conscious as to act suitably to the knowledge of ourselves.

Now this low opinion of ourselves may be considered either in the disposition of our own minds, or as we act towards our neighbour. The first of these is the cause of the other; for by the inward disposition of the mind our conduct toward others is directed.

With regard to our own minds, it is true humility, or a low opinion of ourselves, not be elated from a notion of our endowments and qualifications, or whatever we have, so as to swell upon the thoughts of them, and imagine that we have some peculiar perfection and excellence. It likewise consists in not being ostentatious to take all opportunities of shewing the real abilities and qualities which we have, or to magnify ourselves, and point out our own eminence; as we often see men catching at every incident, to shew us of what importance they are. And farther, such a temper of mind prevents men from desiring eagerly, and pursuing the objects of ambition, from a notion of their worth and significancy; as if they

they were sufficient for any station, trust, or character whatever.

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In the next place, to be humble with regard to our neighbour, to affect no superiority over him, nor to undervalue him; not to be over-bearing, or to despise him; not to boast ourselves of greater worth, but to shew on all occasions a proper regard for him, making great allowances for his weakness or inferiority; or if he be of superior abilities, ingenuously to acknowledge it, and to allow merit where it really is, though it should even excel and obscure our own. Not to detract from him, in order to raise our own credit and character, according to the apostle's rule, Phil. ii. 3. *Doing nothing through strife or vain-glory, but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves.* Such a disposition towards others is true humility, and becomes every one, who by sedate reflection, may be sensible of his own deficiency and minuteness.

From this description of humility, it is easy to see what pride is, which is the reverse of it. That it is to have a high opinion of ourselves, and our endowments; to think of ourselves above what

S E R M. we are, and to fancy that we have some-
 XV. thing amiable and great in our composition, some superiority which we really have not, and then to swell upon the imagination of our own excellence. It is to have such thoughts of our own perfection and powers, as if we were more valuable than the rest of mankind, and of more worth and dignity than all about us: such is the nature of pride in the heart of man, which arises chiefly from an ignorance of himself. But with regard to others, this temper discovers itself to be still more hateful. The proud man is apt to despise and undervalue others, from his vain imagination of himself. He often looks upon them with a disdainful eye, as if they were of a lower species of creatures; his pride often appears in his countenance, *there is a generation*, says the wise man, Prov. xxx. *O how lofty are their eyes! and their eye-lids are lifted up.* He cannot bear others to come in competition with him, to hear them praised or commended wounds him to the quick. It grieves him to see others above him, but it mortifies him to see his equals advanced before him. He always considers the words and actions of others

as

as inferior to his own, and cavils at them S E R M. XV.
 to support his good opinion of himself; }
 directly contrary to the apostle's rule; *let*
us not be desirous of vain-glory, provoking
one another, and envying one another, Gal.
v. 26.

And now having considered what humility is, and it opposite pride, let us go on to observe

II. The reasonableness of humility.
 And in the

1. Place, it is obvious that humility becomes a creature of God. What we are, is owing to his goodness; for to use the words of the Psalmist, *he made us, and not we ourselves.* All we have comes from him; the soul and its noble faculties had its being from him; and our bodies, however beautiful and curiously formed, are the workmanship of his hands. So that whatever natural powers and qualities we are possessed of, they are the gifts of God, for which we ought always gratefully to adore him. Humility therefore, or a low opinion of ourselves, is highly reasonable, and becomes us as creatures in a dependent state. And on the contrary, to boast ourselves of our

S E R M. endowments and excellence, and to despise others who have them not, as if we were the authors of our natural qualities, must be highly unreasonable and absurd. For who joined soul and body together, and so curiously made them? Who gave such graceful ornaments, and in such variety, or in the language of the apostle, 1 Cor. iv. 7. *who maketh thee to differ from another, and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?*

Again, as humility becomes a creature of God, so it much more becomes a sinful and fallen creature. As we have been guilty of many sins, and are perhaps conscious to ourselves of much wickedness, and many transgressions of the laws of our God, for these we ought to be humbled; but when we reflect farther, that we are sprung from a sinful race, a seed of evil-doers; that as our first parents fell from their innocence, so we, and all others, have followed them in their iniquity; I say, when we reflect on all this, we ought to have a humble sense of our own unworthiness and frailty. A creature in such circumstances must

must be beyond expression unreasonable, SERM.
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to have lofty imaginations of its own value and excellence. Can a person seriously consider the frequent sins and impurities he has been guilty of, and not be ashamed to exalt himself, and despise them who have perhaps much more innocence and virtue than himself? But farther, when we reflect on our natural imperfection and frailty, that we are liable to an infinity of disorders, and that at length, the whole frame of our composition will be dissolved by death, this ought to give us an humble view of ourselves. We are perhaps the lowest of all rational creatures; our intellectual powers are very much limited; many things are out of the reach of our understanding, and we often find great difficulty in our reasonings and inquiries about the most important things. And withal, our minds are much clogged with the load of this earthly machine, that is often in disorder, sickly, and corruptible, and which at length decays and tumbles into dust and ashes. That beautiful appearance of our bodies which often gives rise to lofty imaginations, soon languishes and dwindles into earth and corruption. Now

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when we consider this imperfection of our nature, and our infirmities, to which it has pleased our Maker to make us subject, it appears reasonable, that we should be humble in our deportment, that we should not exalt ourselves, and be overbearing and haughty to others; being conscious to ourselves of our own defects and weakness. For *why*, says the son of Syrach, *is earth and ashes proud?*

Moreover, humility is in itself an amiable disposition. It gives no disquiet or dissatisfaction to any, it raises no contention, it never creates any hatred or variance, nor does it in the least ruffle the passions of those we have to deal with. And hence, it is suitable to our social life, where we must often encounter with others of infinitely various tempers, and all justly expect to be treated with proper regard according to their rank and situation. It reconciles men to us, and gains their affection; it cements friendship and increases it; and it often stops the mouth of envy and calumny. If men are in eminent stations when they are humble, they are the more regarded by their inferiors; and on the other hand, the lowest of people are more favoured

voured by their superiors for such a disposition ; by which peace and good-will is preserved among neighbours, and our social happiness is promoted. But withal this, humility makes people easy and quiet within themselves. The humble are not frequently disturbed by any slight or neglect, they bear more easily the follies and impertinencies of men. An imaginary affront does not vex them ; as they behave themselves humbly to others, they cannot easily think that they mean any insults to them. Such an one is not envious at the success of others ; it gives him no pain when his equals or inferiors are raised above him, nor when they are more highly commended or respected ; for he has no emulation, nor any views but what are honest and laudable.

In the last place, *humility* becomes a christian, who has a great example of it set before him by his Saviour. He, who was the Son of God, for the great purposes of our salvation, *made himself of no reputation, taking upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and humbled himself to death, even the death of the cross.* How absurd therefore

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SERM. fore must it be for him who pretends to
 XV. be a follower of Christ, to indulge himself
 in pride, and presume upon his conceived good qualities. An haughty christian is a self-contradicting character; nothing can be more opposite to the disposition of our blessed Redeemer, and the genius of his holy religion; *learn of me*, says he to his disciples, *for I am meek and lowly in heart*. He always acted as an humble teacher of righteousness, so that every proud christian forgets himself, and disregards, and rebels against the example and commands of his Lord and Master.

And thus having seen the reasonableness of humility, let us now in the

III. Place, consider the arguments made use of in the text, for *God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble*. The apostle does not enforce his exhortation from the reasonableness and moral rectitude of the thing, but as one having authority by *revelation* to declare the counsel of God, and the methods of his providence. He considers it as the express will of God; that pride shall be abased,

abased, and humility exalted; that the SERM.
 one shall be chastised, and the other XV.
 rewarded. And therefore, God having
 given sufficient notice of his will, if
 the proud are not corrected here, the
 time is at hand when they shall be
 thoroughly humbled according to their
 deserts.

But besides this punishment in another
 state of things, determined for all impe-
 nitent sinners, *God often resists the proud*
 here in this world. God, in whose hand
 are all our ways, by his providence often
 keeps them in a low and confined state.
 He often confounds and blasts their
 schemes, formed to aggrandize them-
 selves and support their pride. He turns
 all their wisdom and counsels to raise
 themselves, into foolishness. The means
 they use for their advancement, are
 frequently, by a secret interposition of
 things, baffled and turned against them.
 God says to them, as he does to the
 raging sea, *hither shalt thou come, and no
 farther.* And this is very visible in com-
 mon life, that proud men are often
 kept under; and though they wrestle
 eagerly to get the upper hand of others,
 they

SER M. they are as strongly bore down by an
XV. opposition of interests and combination
of things.

But farther, though God may often permit them to rise and be successful, he sometimes so orders it, that they are again pulled down with violence. After a great appearance of grandeur and magnificence, he humbles them effectually by bringing them low, even to contempt and disgrace. Their fall from riches and power, into poverty and distress, is often remarkable, by which they are the scorn of those they have formerly insulted and disdained. *I have seen the wicked in great power, says the Psalmist, xxxvii. 35. spreading himself like a green bay-tree, yet he passed away, and lo, he was not.* And when a proud man falls into any distress, he seldom meets with pity from others; men generally rejoice at his fall. The ill-will that they bear to him for his pride, makes them often combine together, in order to hasten his ruin. In higher life especially, and in the courts of princes, history, in all ages, shews that the most proud men have often been brought down to the lowest situation.

So true is the observation of the wise man, *pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall*, Prov. xvi. 18. SERM.
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and a man's pride shall bring him low.

But in the last place, if a proud man succeeds and attains to some degree of power in the world, and meets with no remarkable disaster, he will nevertheless find his happiness greatly obstructed. He will always be in dread of the spite and combination of some against him, when he reflects how many his pride and insolence has injured and provoked; those who even depend upon him, and must bend before him, will despise him in their hearts. They will be pleased when any thing opposes him, they will earnestly wish for his fall, and if they can secretly contribute to it, they will not be wanting in their endeavours. He can never be esteemed and loved; and therefore, he must ever be in anxiety and fear of some intent to oppose or depress him. So it may justly be said, that God by his providence, and constitution of things in this life, *resisteth the proud*.

The other part of the argument used by the apostle Peter, is, that *he giveth grace*

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grace to the humble; or, as it is expressed, Prov. iii. 34. from which this seems to be taken, *he giveth grace to the lowly*. And this we may consider as an encouragement, and a divine promise, in favour of humility, which may relate either to our souls, or our temporal state. By *grace* is generally understood *favour*, or *good acceptance*; but in scripture it very often signifies some *supernatural assistance* and *influence* on the minds of men. And in this sense, as humility is pleasing and acceptable to God, he may give them more and fuller gifts of his grace, to assist them in the work of their salvation. He may give them a greater influence of his holy Spirit to direct and preserve them in a religious and virtuous practice, because their humble disposition makes them fitter objects of the divine favour and goodness. And besides this reward, which is of a spiritual nature, and chiefly regards their eternal happiness, God may likewise give them grace and favour with men. They may become greatly acceptable to men and regarded by them, which may bring about agreeable and prosperous events, and may make them pass

On Humility.

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pass their life, the time of their sojourn-
ing here, in ease and security.

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Let us therefore, when we reflect on this great virtue, and the blessed effects of it, be all persuaded, as we regard our peace here and happiness hereafter, to be *clothed with humility, for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*

S E R-

half past five, the time of their departure - S.E.M.

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unpublished

Let us therefore, when we reflect on
his great virtues, and the perfect effects
of his all-potent arm, as we regard our
own weakness and happiness, let us
be filled with gratitude for God's
mercy and grace given to us.

And let us be ever
remembering that we are
created for God's glory.

And let us be ever
remembering that we are
created for God's glory.

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S E R M O N XVI.

Prophecy the Testimony of J E S U S
C H R I S T.

R E V E L A T I O N XIX. IO.

*For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of
prophecy.*

I SHALL not consider the connection S E R M.
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of these words with what goes before
in this book or chapter, that I may
be able more accurately to consider what
I chiefly intend. The meaning of them
there is this, that the sure evidence or
testimony of the mission of the apostles
by our Lord, is the spirit of prophecy,
with which they were endued. This, I
say, is the meaning, if we view them
only with regard to the preceding verses;
but they may be very well understood in
a more general sense, which the literal
construction of them will bear, viz. that
the evidence or testimony of the divine
mission of Jesus Christ himself, as well as
those who were commissioned by him, is
X the

SERMON. the spirit of prophecy. By the spirit of
 XVI. prophecy, we understand the power of
 describing distant future events, which
 cannot be foreseen by the ordinary pene-
 tration or sagacity of men. In this sense,
 the like phrase is often used in the scrip-
 tures; thus we read of the *spirit of know-
 ledge*, of the *spirit of meekness*, of the *spi-
 rit of judgment*, and the like, by which is
 meant the gift of these several faculties or
 virtues; all which *worketh the same spirit
 of God, dividing to every man severally as
 he will.* And such are the usual effects
 of the operations of the holy Spirit, by
 which he ministreth to the use of the
 church, and people of God; but pro-
 phesy is his extraordinary gift, which
 he only communicates to few, at parti-
 cular periods of time, for the general in-
 terest of religion, or to confirm a divine
 revelation.

In discoursing on this subject, I shall
 endeavour

- I. To consider the nature of prophecy,
 and the use of it, in proving the
 truth of the christian religion.
- II. To give some instances of prophe-
 cy, among many, that are con-
 tained

tained in the Old and New Testa-SERM.
ment, which are evidently fulfilled, XVI.
and which greatly strengthen the
evidence for the divine original of
the gospel. And in the

Last place, make some practical re-
flections.

And this subject, as it will tend to il-
lustrate the influence of the Holy Ghost,
prophecy being one of his chief and un-
common operations, it will not, I hope,
be improper for the purpose of this day,
on which we commemorate his divine
effusion on the apostles at the time of
Pentecost. I am

I. Then, to consider the nature of
prophecy, and the use of it in proving
the christian religion. Now it is evi-
dent, that God, who is infinite in know-
ledge, who sees all the possible combina-
tions of things, who knows the circum-
stances of all men that are in being, and
that are to be, and all the consequences
of their actions, may foresee things that
shall come to pass at the greatest distance
of time. Nor is this inconsistent with
the freedom of human actions; for if
God knows all the possible ways of act-

SERM.
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ing that men may have, and all their motives to action, he knows what things are most probable to be, and how reasonable agents will probably determine themselves; and therefore, as God knows all that possibly can be known, he can by his providence so order things, as to make them assist in bringing about any particular event, without affecting human liberty. For if men are left free with regard to virtue and vice, which is the essential part of their reasonable nature, God may influence their minds in other things of less consequence to their happiness, so as to lead them to an intended event. It is plain then, that prophecy, or the foretelling of future events, at any distant time, is possible with regard to God; and that God can communicate this knowledge to some men, seems to be likewise possible; for as he made the faculties of their mind to be what they are, he may likewise, by some method, make them to see distant things coming to pass, that cannot be apprehended by the ordinary reach of human understanding; or he may communicate this knowledge by a voice, or a vision, or by some superior reasonable agents,

agents, as angels are supposed to be, SERM.
XVI.
And as we know the usual reach of human foresight, how little we can see into futurity, and how often we are wrong in our conjectures and schemes concerning the probability of things to be hereafter; if we can find that some persons have been able to foretel very distant future events, to be fulfilled in after-ages, that could not come within the reach of human knowledge, and to describe them in as clear a manner as if they had already come to pass, without any straining or artful construction of words, there can be no doubt but such persons have had some divine revelation made to them. There is no avoiding this conclusion, because it is impossible otherwise, to conceive how men can foresee such things, among all the infinite number of events that may happen. It is true, that if any one had the presumption to foretel an event that was to be some centuries after he lived, and describe it particularly, it may possibly be that something may happen to correspond with it, in some of the circumstances; but there would be a million of chances to one, that it would not agree in all the description. A man

might foretel some ages hence perhaps, some general things, or some things that usually happen; but that he should be able to foretel some grand revolution, for instance, something contrary to all probabality, and opposite to the present establishment and course of the world, seems to be impossible, without the direction of him, who alone knows all events that are future. And therefore, if in the scriptures there are predictions of some unusual events to be in distant ages, contrary to the ordinary course of things, and described minutely in their circumstances, and these events come to pass exactly, what can be said, or what solution can be given, unless we suppose something of divine assistance? It can never be said, that it was by mere accident, for it is next to an impossibility that the prediction and event could agree in all the circumstances; and if we could imagine the possibility of one such prediction by accident being accomplished, no man could seriously say, that two or three such described in the same books, could ever have been fulfilled; this seems to be absolutely impossible; for one may as well imagine, that a
number

number of colours, thrown accidentally SERM.
XVI. on a piece of canvas, would produce a finished picture; or that a number of printing types, jumbled together by chance, should form an elegant poem, as that a number of predictions to be made good in after-ages, and found in the same book, could by accident be clearly fulfilled. And therefore, if there can be produced in the scriptures, a number of prophecies of events, which were to be in after-ages, and which are clearly accomplished, it seems to be a plain demonstration, that these books were written by the direction of some being, superior in knowledge to the sons of men. And it farther proves, that the doctrines therein delivered, have a fair pretension to more than human authority; as they were taught by persons who had such supernatural abilities, and who seemed to be thus assisted by the divine foreknowledge. For it becomes probable, that they might know more of God, and of his will, and what was for the happiness of mankind than others, who had not such gifts from heaven, could pretend to. And all those miracles and wonderful works, related in

these books, to have been wrought in confirmation of christianity, gain from hence a farther degree of credibility and strength to the testimony given for them; for it is very likely, that those who could foretel distant and improbable events, might also have other powers to perform extraordinary and supernatural works. So that if such prophecies in the Bible are accomplished, the whole scheme of christianity seems to be confirmed; and what might be supposed defective in human testimony from the distance of time, and the superior degree of evidence that might be required for miraculous works, is thus fully supplied by the fulfilling of prophecies. And the gradual accomplishment of prophecy in succeeding ages, will not only prevent the decrease of credibility from testimony, but also make the proof of christianity stronger than it is at present. Let us now in the

II. Place, give some instances of prophecy, amongst many, that are contained in the Old and New Testament, which are evidently fulfilled, and which greatly strengthen the evidence of the divine original of the gospel. And here,
I shall

I shall only mention those, of which SERM. XVI.
we know the prophecy to have been
long before the event, without going
into the abstruser parts of history.
And the

1. That offers itself to our thoughts,
from the extraordinary circumstances
which attend it, is the prophecy of the
dispersion of the Jews, and their being
preserved as a distinct people among all
nations after the destruction of their
city. Thus in the book of Leviticus,
chap. xxvi. it is said, *If ye will not hearken
to me, and will not do all these command-
ments, then will I also walk contrary to you
in fury, and I will chastise you seven times
for you sins—and I will scatter you among
the heathen, and will draw out a sword
after you, and your land shall be desolate,
and your cities waste. And yet for all
that, when they be in the land of their ene-
mies, I will not cast them away, neither
will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly,
and to break my covenant with them, for I
am the Lord their God; but I will for their
sakes remember the covenant of their ances-
tors, whom I brought forth out of the land
of Egypt.* And in the prophecies of Je-
remlah, the same thing is twice repeated
in

SERM. in the xxxth and xlvth chapters. *I am*
XVI. *with thee, saith the Lord, to save thee,*
though I make a full end of all nations whi-
ther I have scattered thee, yet will I not
make a full end of thee, but I will correct
thee in measure. We now see the Jews a
living monument of the truth of this
prophecy, and the event of it fully ac-
complished in them. They have, since
the destruction of their government and
city, which was brought upon them by
their incorrigible wickedness, been scat-
tered over all the habitable world; they
have been despised and hated wherever
they have come, and *a sword drawn out*
after them, by prodigious slaughters of
them among many nations, which one
would have thought would have dissi-
pated them entirely; and yet they have
been preserved as a distinct body of peo-
ple, as it were, sojourning in the earth,
without the possession of any part of any
country in the world. The greatest
kingdoms and empires that ever have
been, are now so lost and absorbed, that
there is not the least remains of them
but in history; the Assyrians, the Per-
sians, the Macedonians, and the Romans,
who have all of them governed the
world

world in their turn, are now gone, with-
out any appearance of their strength and
dominion. But the Jews continue, con-
trary to all other nations, and the usual
course of things, as much a distinct peo-
ple as they were seventeen hundred years
ago, when they were in their own land.
And there is no possibility of accounting
for this, from any schemes of policy or
government that these people have pecu-
liar to themselves; nothing of this kind
can be supposed to have operated so long
against their own interest; it would ma-
nifestly be for their advantage to incor-
porate with other nations, and settle and
acquire possessions among them, rather
than be vagrants over all the earth.
Nor can their religious principles be suf-
ficient so long to keep them thus sepa-
rate; all other nations have made great
changes in their religion; they have
turned from heathenism to the purity
of the gospel, and from thence to popery,
and from popery reformed to protestan-
tism, and from thence, some into popery
again. And other nations have turned
from Christianity to Mahometanism. The
Jews themselves have often, before their
Babylonish captivity, relapsed into idola-
try ;

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try ;

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try; but that now, considered as a nation since that time, they should continue firm without any variation in their religion, is amazing, and can never be accounted for, without owning the hand of providence, which designs to fulfil this prophecy.

Another instance may be given from the prophecies concerning Babylon. This was at the time of the Jewish captivity, the metropolis of the world, and the most remarkable city for glory and beauty upon earth. It was sixty miles in compass, and built with such walls and gates as if it had been to endure to eternity. Now of this city it is prophesied thus by Isaiah, *Behold I will, saith the Lord, stir up the Medes against them, and Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrha; it shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation; neither shall the Arabian pitch his tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their folds there; I will make it a possession for the bittern, and pools of water, and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction.* And to the same purpose the prophet Jeremiah

miah says in chap. 1. *I have laid a snare* SERM.
for thee, and thou art also taken, O Baby- XVI.
lon! and thou wast not aware, saith the
Lord—it shall no more be inhabited for
ever; neither shalt it be dwelt in from gene-
ration to generation. As God overthrew
Sodom, so shall no men abide there; neither
shall the Son of man dwell therein. Now
 without the strange manner of taking
 this city, as it were in a snare, by the
 Medes and Persians, which can be proved
 to have been one hundred and fifty years
 after this prophecy, could the sagacity of
 any man foresee, that so great and glorious
 a city should be so entirely ruined and
 destroyed, that it is now scarce known
 where it stood? It was built upon the
 banks of the Euphrates, in a pleasant
 and plentiful country, like a garden, that
 naturally invited inhabitants, and was
 visited by all strangers, on the account
 of its wonderful structure and the curi-
 osities that were to be seen in it. Could
 it then enter into the head of any man,
 that this mistress of the world was to be
absolutely desolate, without one inhabitant,
 and that it was to be *pools of water*, that
no shepherd could make his folds there;
 which is the very account that travellers
 now give of it? Could it be foreseen that
 it

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it was to be *deserted, destroyed, and overflowed* gradually by the river Euphrates, and never any part of it built again? This was so unlikely, that it could never have been conjectured. Suppose the like event was foretold of any of the great cities of Europe now, how improbable would that appear? But if the prediction was verified in after-ages, it must then be allowed to have come from God. A

3. Instance of the fulfilling of prophecy, may be seen in the fate of *Tyre*. This was a city famous for its trade and merchandize among the ancients, and greatly enriched by it. It was first taken by Nebuchadnezzar, and afterwards rebuilt near the old place, in a little island, where it was strongly fenced, having the sea to surround it; but it was again taken, and destroyed by Alexander the Great. Now concerning it, the prophet Ezekiel, chap. xxvi. thus prophesied, above one hundred years before the event. *Thus saith the Lord God, behold I am against thee, O Tyre, and I will cause many nations to come up against thee, as the sea causeth his waves to come up, and they shall destroy the walls of Tyre, and break down the tower of it—it shall be a place for the spreading of nets, in the midst of the sea*

sea—it shall be built no more. Now one SERM.
cannot but remark the condition it is in XVI.
at this day ; not only the Old Tyre, but
the New Tyre, are, strictly speaking,
what the prophet said, a place to spread
nets on. And particularly as to the
New Tyre, it is described to be in such a
condition by a late traveller, that there
is not so much as one entire house left.
Its present inhabitants are only a few
poor people, harbouring themselves in
the vaults, and subsisting chiefly on fish-
ing ; who seem to be preserved in this
place by providence, as a visible argu-
ment, how God fulfilled his word con-
cerning Tyre, that it should be a place
for fishers to dry their nets on. Now
who could foresee that so famous a place
should be reduced to such a dismal con-
dition, without the divine assistance ?
For if one could imagine, that it is pos-
sible to foretel the sacking or destroying
of a city, yet surely it is impossible to
foretel that such a city shall never be
built again, and only prove a conveni-
ent situation for fishermen. A

4. Instance I may give of Egypt. It
was prophesied concerning it by Ezekiel,
xxix. 14. after its captivity by Nebu-
chadnezzar,

SERM. chadnezzar, that it should be a *base*
 XVI. *kingdom, neither shall it exalt itself any*
more above the nations; for I will diminish
them, that they shall no more rule over the
nations. Now since that time, it has
 ever been in a low servile state, always
 governed by foreigners, conquered by
 the Persians, Macedonians, Romans, Sa-
 racens, and at last by the Turks, who
 possess it at this day. Could it then
 possibly be in the reach of human saga-
 city to foresee, that a kingdom, which
 once in the first ages of the world made
 the greatest figure for knowledge and
 arts, and had a vast military power, and
 was besides, one of the most plentiful
 countries upon the globe, I say, could
 it be foreseen, that this kingdom should
 degenerate for ever, and that for near
 two thousand years it should only be a
 tributary province to another? This could
 only be known to him, who ruleth over
 the nations, and sets bounds to them as
 he does to the sea, that they shall not
 pass them.

I might also give several instances in
 the prophecies of Daniel, where the
 greatest revolutions that have ever been
 in the world, are plainly foretold, though
 they

they happened some hundreds of years ^{S, E R M.}
after the time of that prophet. He has ^{XVI.}
evidently described the rise and fall of the
Persian, Grecian, and Roman empires,
and upon the dissolution of this last, the
division of it into ten kingdoms, chap.
vii. and then, that three of them being
destroyed, there arose one in their place
that prospered wonderfully, and persecuted
the people of God, and they were given
into his hand for a time, all which we
know from history; but it would take
too much time, and perhaps, it might
be improper to enter particularly on this
argument. Those who understand his-
tory, if they will seriously look into this
book of Daniel, will easily be persuaded,
that some divine influence must have
been afforded to him, when he could
foresee such great revolutions of empires
in distant ages.

I might likewise mention the predicti-
ons of several of the prophets, concerning
the coming of Christ, his character, and
sufferings, and the happy success of his
gospel in the world, but this would lead
me too far; I would only observe, that no
man can seriously read the prophecy of
Isaiah and Daniel, without seeing many
Y things

S E R M. things fulfilled in the history of the New
 XVI. Testament concerning Christ, and the
 times of the gospel. In some places of
 those prophetic books, the description of
 the events in the gospel is so clear, that
 they seem rather to be written after the
 event than before, though it is certain that
 they were in being at least five hundred
 years before our Saviour's days.

Let us now proceed to the New Testament, to give some more instances of prophecy. And

1. It is plainly foretold by our Saviour, Luke xxi. that Jerusalem shall be destroyed, and trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. By the times of the Gentiles being fulfilled, seems to be understood the time, when the various events intended by providence, in the calling of the Gentiles, and the establishment of the kingdom of Christ among them, shall be fulfilled. Now this prediction has been fully verified concerning Jerusalem; it was taken and destroyed by a Roman army, and since that time it has never been possessed by the Jews, but been under the power of other nations. And though there have been several attempts made to restore

store them to their city and country, yet SERM. XVI. they have all failed, and made good the truth of this prophecy. And particularly it is known, that a powerful Roman emperor, Julian the apostate, out of his hatred to the christians, and that he might falsify this prediction, and turn it into ridicule, endeavoured to settle again the Jews at Jerusalem, but the project came to nothing; by which we may see, that notwithstanding all the opposition of men, the *word of our God shall stand for ever*; and Jerusalem must still be, according to this prophecy, some time longer *trodden down of the Gentiles*. A

2. Instance of prophecy in the New Testament, may be found in St. Paul's epistle to 1 Timothy iv. 1. *The Spirit, says he, speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils (or demons, as it ought to be rendered) speaking lies in hypocrisy—forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe.* Now this seems to be a clear description of the corruptions that have crept in among Christians. For do not

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SERM. we see those of the church of Rome, giving
 XVI. heed to the doctrines of demons, by their
 worship of departed souls, and the invocation of saints, as mediators between God and them, which practice was not introduced till near three hundred years after the time of St. Paul? Do we not likewise see them *speaking lies in hypocrisy*, counterfeiting miracles, and imposing upon the credulity of the people, with false stories of saints and martyrs? Do we not also see them forbidding to marry, by obliging all their clergy, under the severest penalties, to live single lives, while they are willing to connive at their unchaste behaviour? And do not they engage multitudes of women to live in nunneries, in a state of celibacy, under vain pretences of sanctity, for which there is not the least ground in the scriptures? being contrary to the very examples of the apostles themselves; nor did this practice begin before the fourth century. And do we not likewise see the members of that church abstain from meats, under the pretence of mortification and holiness, contrary to that plain declaration of the apostle, 1 Cor. viii. 8. *Meat commendeth us not unto God; for neither*

neither if we eat are we the better, neither if we eat not are we the worse? Was it then possible, that the good apostle could foresee all these corruptions to come into the church, so many hundred years after, without the divine assistance? What human sagacity could guess that christians would so manifestly pervert the scriptures, and corrupt the practice of a pure and holy religion? What man is there living, that can foresee the opinions of after-ages, and foretel what sects and parties may prevail? There is no way of accounting for such predictions, without allowing the apostle to be inspired by that Spirit, which foresees all the various events among the children of men.

In the last place, I may mention that prophecy of the same apostle, concerning antichristian power and tyranny, which was to arise from those corruptions among believers, and to prevail over the church and people of God, 2 Thess. ii. 3. *Let no man deceive you, says he, by any means, for that day, meaning the day of judgment, shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, even the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all*

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XVI.

that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God—even him whose coming is after the working of satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders. Now do we not see an amazing accomplishment of this? Is there not a person that rules over a great part of the christian world, who blasphemously assumes to himself the character of God's vicar upon earth; who exalts himself above all that is called holy; who even assumes to himself the title of *Holiness*; who has worship paid to him, and divine titles ascribed to him; and who takes upon him to act as God, by forgiving sins, and indulging men in the practice of iniquity; who sits as a God in the church of the living God, and declares himself to be the infallible judge of all controversies among christians, and pours out his curses on all those who reject his decrees? And who has frequently fictitious miracles wrought by his connivance, to deceive his admirers. This event so plainly corresponds to the prophecy of the apostle, that one cannot but be struck with it. For could it ever enter into the heart of man to
 imagine,

imagine, that such an absurd and tyrannical power could ever be among christians? This is something so strange, both in the event and prediction, that one cannot but be convinced, that such foreknowledge comes only from him, to whom all things in all futurity are known.

And thus I have endeavoured to lay before you some instances of prophecy, that are plainly contained in the scriptures. And now, upon the whole, let any man seriously consider with himself, whether such a variety of predictions, which seem to be exactly verified in the events, could ever possibly have been foreseen so many ages before, without the assistance of God? Is it possible, that bare chance could ever make the events correspond so exactly with the prophecies? If we could conceive it possible in one or two instances, can we dream that it could be so in all? No man that is serious, can ever imagine this; for there is no other book in the world that contains such things; nor can we give any like cases in history of predictions: and if we cannot, shall we not say, that there are some things in the Bible which evi-

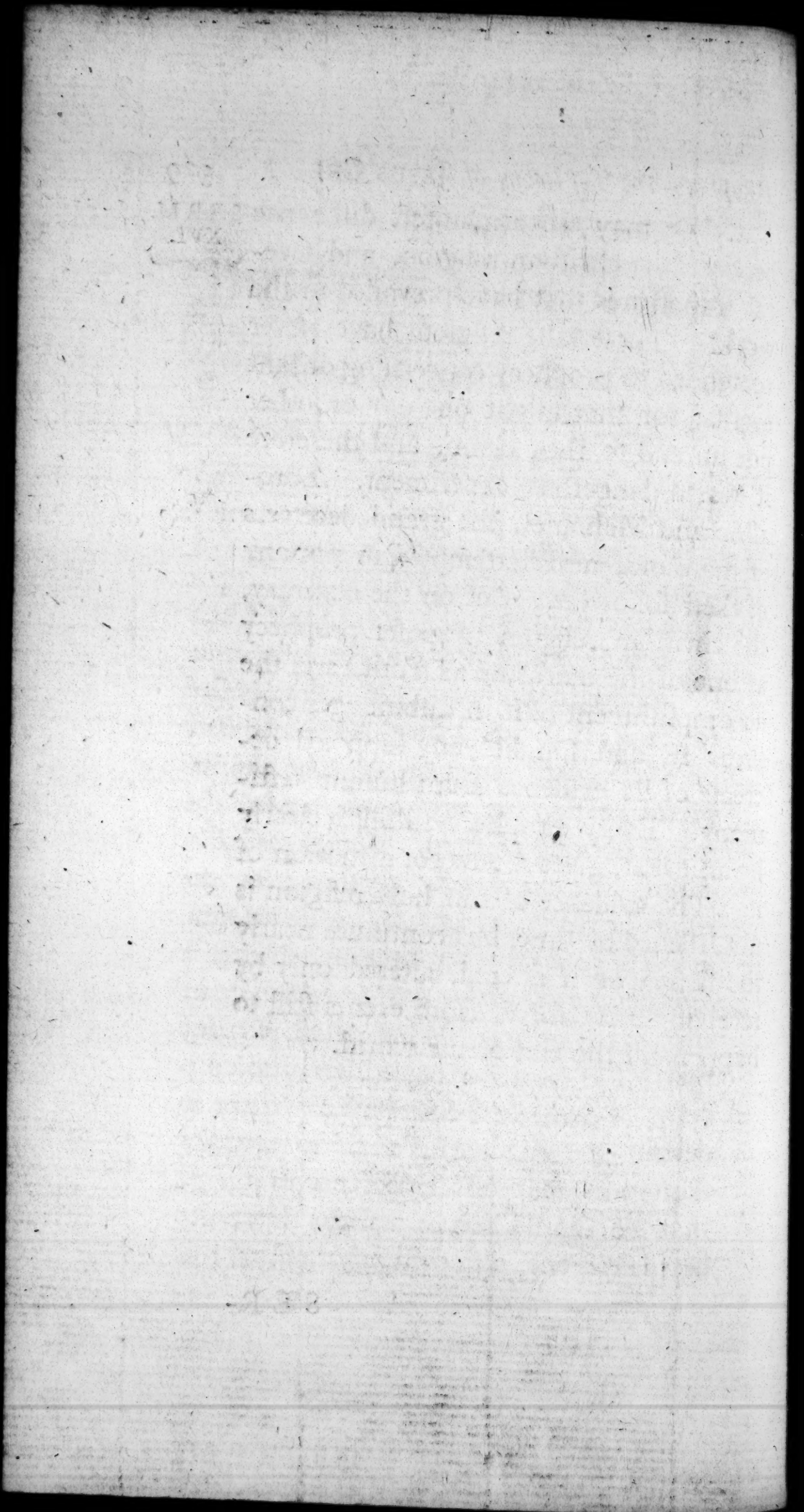
SERM. ^{XVI.} dently shew its divine original, and prove the truth of our holy religion? This then is a mark by which we desire our faith to be tried, and upon this may we place the stress of our cause, *that the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*

We may, from what has been said, make the following reflections. And

1. Let us all be confirmed in the belief of our holy religion. For those prophecies contained in the scriptures, which are accomplished, are like so many miracles performed to our senses. They do not depend upon testimony; for we can, by our own enquiry, be fully satisfied of the truth of them. We need only see whether such events have ever come to pass, and whether they be really foretold in the scriptures. And if the accomplishment of those prophecies be clear and certain, we may rest satisfied that our foundation standeth sure, and that God is the author of a religion which is thus supported. And there is no evading the force of this argument, but by shewing that those prophecies have never been fulfilled; which can only be done by contradicting our senses, or destroying all the monuments of history.

2. We

2. We may see a manifest difference S E R M.
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between the christian religion, and several impostures that have prevailed in the world. Those false religions have never pretended to prophecy concerning distant events, for that might one day or other put an end to their claim, and therefore it was a dangerous experiment. Zoroaster and Mahomet, the grand deceivers of mankind, never attempted it, nor any of their followers. But on the contrary, the christian religion proposes prophecy as one of the marks of its truth, and the accomplishment of it in distant ages confirms it, and supplies any supposed decrease of its evidence from human testimony. Every prophecy fulfilled clearly by an event, gives a new confirmation of it. The evidence of our holy religion is not lessened by time, but continues nearly the same ; or if altered, altered only by receiving new force, from events still to happen till the end of the world.



S E R M O N X V I I .

G O D the Governor of the World.

P S A L M X X I I . 28.

The kingdom is the Lord's, and he is the governor among the nations.

IF we were to judge from some single S E R M.
XVII. things which we observe frequently among men, we might easily be led to think, that either there is no difference between good and evil, or that the supreme Being does not at all regard the moral actions of men. *Things come frequently alike unto all; there is often one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; as is the good, so is the sinner; so that it is difficult to know either love or hatred by all that is before us.* What shall we say then? has God no regard for the concerns of men, and does he leave them to devour one another? Far be it from the Almighty that he should do unjustly; that he should not regard the difference between good and evil. To affirm this
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SERM. of him, is to deny his existence, or at
 XVII. least to destroy his perfections. Surely
 whatever the appearance of things may
 be, there is an all-wise and secret-govern-
 ing providence, which rules over the ac-
 tions of men, and is particularly con-
 cerned for the religious and virtuous, for
 those who fear God and endeavour to
 please him. The infinitely good God
 does certainly govern the world; and
 whatever difficulties we may have about
 some things we observe, the most strict
 and fair reasoning will ever conclude
 with the Psalmist in the text, that *the
 kingdom is the Lord's, and he is the gover-
 nor among the nations.*

As the words may contain a distinct
 proposition by themselves, I shall not
 consider their connection with the rest of
 the psalm. Their sense seems to be very
 plain, as they evidently mean, that what-
 ever direction or power a prince may
 be said to have in ruling the affairs of
 his kingdom, or a governor over those
 who are under him, the same hath God,
 though in an higher degree, and more
 effectual way, over the actions of men
 in general; that not only all the great
 events and transactions of the world, but
 even

even what relates to every individual, is directed by him, and subject to his dominion and power. And the Psalmist seems here chiefly to signify the moral government of God over his free and reasonable creatures; which though it be of the most noble and exalted kind, and more particularly concerns us, is yet but a part of the whole authority which he exercises over the universe. For God has the government over all his creatures, animate and inanimate, rational and irrational; by which he preserves them in life and being, and influences them according to their nature and circumstances; and this is what we commonly call the divine providence. The inanimate and brutal part of the creation, he governs by necessary laws, according to what he has established in the beginning; and as they are only impelled, they cannot possibly deviate from them. But necessity has no place among free and reasonable creatures, who can only be governed by methods suitable to their superior nature, and in the ruling of whom is chiefly shewn his goodness, mercy, and faithfulness.

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In the following discourse, I shall consider this moral government of God over his free and reasonable creatures. And I shall

I. Endeavour briefly to shew, that there is a providence which presides over mankind; and that not only all the great revolutions and events are directed by it, but that also it is exercised about every individual.

II. I shall make some observations upon it. And

Lastly, make some practical inferences.

I. I am to shew that God rules amongst men, and that he is concerned for every individual. If we consider God as an intelligent being, every where present, and that he essentially exists in every part of the universe, (which may easily be proved from the absolute necessity of his existence) it will be evident, that nothing can exist any where, where he must not be conscious of its being and circumstances; that he must know it intimately and perfectly; must see its essential qualities, its powers, and manner of acting. And if God is infinitely powerful (which must

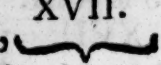
must also be allowed) it will be farther SER M.
XVII. evident, that every thing can be done by him; every change of circumstance of any being can be made, which it is fit and proper for him to effect. And farther, if we add, that he is infinitely wise (which the structure of the universe sufficiently shews) it will be plain, that he can direct every thing in the circumstances of any being to serve some reasonable end. So that from the notion of God's being every where present, joined with his infinite power and wisdom, it is plain, in general, that every being is always present to him, and at all times perfectly known to him, and may be acted upon and directed by him.

If we consider the nature of man, that he is a free and reasonable being, capable of knowing his Maker, and that he is of superior order and dignity to the other creatures in the universe, it must be allowed, that from the excellency of his nature, he is particularly entitled to the care and direction of his Creator. For, if from the divine perfection, we must conclude that every being, even the minutest, may be acted upon and directed by him, the argument is stronger with regard

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regard to mankind, who are so considerable and noble a part of the creation. And it will be difficult to account for the divine goodness, if God be supposed to take care of any inferior beings, and to neglect, or not regard his reasonable creatures.

In the natural world, we may observe every thing, in the minutest circumstance, directed by wisdom and power, and tending to some reasonable end. The inanimate, the vegetable bodies, and the brute animals, are all of them plainly influenced by certain laws, fitting their several natures, and preserved in such circumstances as are suitable to the continuing their several species, and proper for the ends of their existence. And this care seems also to be extended to every individual, in proportion to its importance. Now if there is such a care visible in the material world, why may not we reason by analogy, that the same is exerted in the system of moral and free beings? May not the divine Being be as much concerned, if not more, for the good of the whole, and of every individual of mankind? And on the contrary, to suppose that God has no care or concern

cern for the happiness of man ; that they S E R M. XVII.
are not under his government, gives us, 
not only the most melancholy view of
our situation, but would lead us also to
think that the divine nature wants those
perfections of munificence and power,
which are necessary for the government
of the world ; and this could only end in
downright atheism.

Indeed, to a reasonable and virtuous
man, the whole beauty of the creation
would be lost, if he could imagine there
was no providence that ruled among
men. What comfort and satisfaction
could he have in all the various adven-
tures of his life, if he knew that the Deity
had no concern for his happiness ? What
pleasure could the wisdom, power, har-
mony, and variety, that appears in all
the parts of the universe, give him, if he
was excepted from the general concern,
and this wisdom and power were not em-
ployed for his direction and preservation ?
If life, at present, is so often checquered
with its dark and disagreeable circum-
stances, how uncomfortable, how un-
supportable would it be, in such a con-
dition, where we could never hope for
any superior being to help and direct us ?

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We seem then to conclude, that there is a care or providence which rules among men ; and that not only great events are directed by it, but that also it is concerned for every individual. And indeed, virtuous and good men have generally in all ages, acknowledged a providence by which the world was governed. They thought the human nature of too much importance to be neglected by the Deity ; and they never doubted, but if there did exist a supreme Being at all, he must be endued with such perfections as would qualify him to be the governor of the world. In the scriptures we have circumstantial, historical accounts of the providence of God towards his church and people in the first ages ; which seems to be given as a sample of what he is always doing, at all times in the world. And even in the common history of mankind, we have many remarkable instances of God's over-ruling the greatest events in favour of good men, and those so plain and convincing, that in every part of them, men were obliged to acknowledge the superior direction.

The scriptures often express sentiments of this kind in the strongest manner ; in
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the text, says the Psalmist, *he is the Governor of the nations.* And in Psal. xciii. SERM.
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The Lord reigneth, he is clothed with majesty. And again, in the xcviith, *The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice, let the multitude of the isles be glad.* And in the ciii. says he, *his kingdom ruleth over all.* To the same purpose, in Psal. iii. *O Lord, thou preservest man and beast.* In the book of Daniel, iv. 25. says that prophet, *The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will—and he doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, and say unto him, what dost thou?* St. Peter also exhorts, *to cast our care upon him, for he careth for us.*

I come now to the

II. Thing proposed, to make some observations relating to this providence of God over his reasonable creatures. And

1. It may be proper to observe, that God's providence, or his ruling among men, is to be understood consistently with the liberty of human actions; for though God may influence the minds of men in some events of their life, which

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may be of great consequence to their happiness, and by which great things may be effected in the world, we may yet lay down this as a certain principle, that he leaves the determination of their wills, with regard to virtue and vice, perfectly free: for if they are not free in this particular, there can be no religion, no virtue nor vice, no rewards nor punishments hereafter; and the whole assemblage of moral beings, as well as the natural world, can be only a system of mechanism, always determined by the will and power of the Creator. Or if it is thought that the notion of providence restrains human liberty, it must be allowed at the same time, that it is rather in those instances where man acts as a natural agent, than as an accountable creature.

2. We may observe, that the multiplicity, the infinite number and diversity of beings, which are subject to the divine providence, is no argument at all against its existence, for this is a difficulty arising only from our own weakness; as we cannot ourselves attend to many and various objects at once, we are not able to imagine, how it is possible,

ble, for the divine nature to observe all S E R M. XVII.
 the creatures, and to take care of each
 of them in particular. But we are sure,
 that if God is every where present, and
 exists without limitation in every part of
 the universe, every being must be equally
 known to him, and at all times under
 his view. And though it may be in-
 comprehensible to our narrow minds, we
 are certain that it must be so, because
 for the same reason that God exists at all,
 he must be every where. Now if God is
 every where, why may not all reasonable
 creatures be under his care, however they
 be dispersed and intermixed through the
 universe? And why may not each in
 particular be influenced by that means,
 and the events of his life be determined
 by him? We have some resemblance of
 this in nature; the beams of the sun are
 equally diffused through the world, and
 enliven every creature with its light and
 heat, and the multitude and diversity of
 things, that are exposed to it, do not
 hinder its virtue and effect upon every
 individual; all are equally, according to
 their several natures, benefited by it; and
 its power is nothing lessened upon any
 particular object, through the infinite

S E R M. variety of things that are subject to it.
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And if we see this in the natural world, if we see so much power and perfection in one of the inanimate creatures, why may not we imagine something analogous, though vastly superior to this, in the providential care of the great Creator, the *Father of lights*, as St. James expresseth it, *with whom there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning.*

3. We may observe, that the obscurity of the divine providence, or the difficulty that there may be of understanding its design in particular instances, can be no argument against its existence and operation. As we have only a partial view of things, and know not what relation that which we observe may bear to the whole scheme, we can never be able to judge of the intent of any particular part; for, as from a fragment of a picture, or a small part of an edifice, we can determine nothing concerning the design and regularity of the whole; so from some few particulars, which come within the compass of our knowledge, we can never comprehend the justness of the entire scheme of providence. And perhaps, if we could know more of the par-

particulars, our faculties are not enlarged enough to connect them together. There may be a beauty and harmony in things, which beings of our capacity can never apprehend; and therefore, it is very possible, that the regularity and justness of the whole divine conduct, among reasonable beings, can never be understood but by his own infinite perception.

4. We may observe, that not only the obscurity, but also the apparent inequality of the dispensations of the divine providence, with regard to good and bad men in this life, is no just argument against it; because, as we cannot know all the circumstances of men, and their dependencies upon one another, we cannot possibly say, how far an equal distribution may be reasonable. Some good men, have vicious and wicked dependants; so that if the former were to be rewarded according to their virtue, the others must share in it. And on the other hand, some vicious men, have good and virtuous dependants, that if the former were punished, the others would partake in the affliction which they have not deserved; so that in the present state of things, as men are so in-

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termixed with one another, a regular distribution of virtue and vice, in many instances must be improper. And what our Saviour says in his parable, may here justly be applied ; *if the tares are gathered up, the wheat will also be rooted up with them : let both grow together, says he, until the time of the harvest.* In many cases too we are, perhaps, mistaken in the reality of men's virtues and vices ; we are often deceived by false appearances ; for there are men, whom we charitably think to be valuable, and who are yet vicious in the highest degree ; and there are others, whom, through prejudices we judge to be vicious, and who yet are truly worthy and good : so that our notions of the inequality of divine providence, can seldom be just. And though there are men who are truly virtuous, concerning whom no reason can be assigned for the unequal dispensations of providence, in their misfortunes and adversities, yet as there is sufficient evidence for another life, we know not what relation the things that befall them here, may have to their happiness hereafter. And besides, as this state of existence is so short and inconsiderable, the evils that oppress them now
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are of little importance, if they are to be rewarded according to the degrees of their virtue through eternity; that just balance of things will sufficiently compensate the inequality here. SER M.
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5. We observe, that the natural course of things among men, arising from their different interests and passions, does no way exclude a secret providence from acting in the world. For the methods of providence, in many instances, may be so subtil and refined, that we cannot distinguish between them and the natural course; and yet they may be totally distinct and independent. And though it may be imperceptible to us, who cannot see the secret springs of action among men, there may be often supernatural impressions made on their minds, by which they may be excited to act in the particular manner intended by providence. And this is even frequently visible, in the sudden and unexpected turns of affairs in the world, which are inconceivable to the most refined understanding. The least trifle, or minutest accident, is sometimes the occasion of great alterations and revolutions; a little change in the health of a person, or a little alteration

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tion in his notions, which may be effected by some invifible power, will often give rife to great events in his life, and yet appear fo natural all the while, that we may not difcern it from a common occurrence.

6. We may obferve, that under fuch a providence, virtuous and good men cannot but be the principal objects of care and concern. For though it may be difficult for us, in fome cafes, to difcern that good men are here peculiarly favoured by providence; yet it muft be allowed, that if God is of a perfect moral character, he muft be pleafed with thofe reasonable creatures, who endeavour to imitate the perfection of his nature; or if we confider him as the juft Governor of the univerfe, he muft make a diftinction betwixt the obedient and thofe who rebel and difregard him. And therefore, as from the fitness of the thing, the virtuous have a better claim to his care and protection, than the vicious and immoral, or thofe who have no regard for his will and pleafure; we may reafonably think, feeing he always does what is right, that he will have a regard for their happinefs, fo far as is confiftent with

with the general good. At least from his goodness we may presume, that he will so order things, in the course of their existence, that they upon the whole shall be happy. For unless the good and virtuous are made happy, by a proper chain of events, in the whole of their existence, there could be no tolerable account given of the goodness of the Deity; and all our notions and reasonings concerning his attributes, and the perfection of his nature, would be dark and uncertain.

In the last place we may observe, that, if the divine providence over-rules all things, there must be some general scheme carried on in the moral world, some grand design in favour of religion and virtue. For if God can have any regard to his own honour and worship from his creatures, and as it is impossible he should not, then it is certain, that the great revolutions and events of the world, must have some tendency to that purpose; because it is absurd and inconsistent with any notion of divine perfection, that all the great alterations which are in the world, should be under the direction of providence, and yet that there should be

no

S E R M. no regard to religion and virtue. If God
XVII. has a regard to the general good, how
can that be effected, but by promoting
religion and virtue ; and therefore, if the
conduct of providence is rational, there
must be some tendency in the course of
events to support this design, that at
last the cause of truth and righteousness
may prevail. It is true, that we do not
see that things have this direction in the
world ; perhaps, through the narrowness
of our minds, as we have not access to
view the whole of the divine plan ; yet it
is impossible but that it must be so, when
we consider the difficulties on every side.
The course of things toward this end must
indeed be slow, as they are to be carried
on consistently with the freedom of hu-
man actions ; and the wickedness of
mankind may retard their progress, as
God does not act by forcible means upon
his reasonable creatures ; but it will not
always do so ; there must be a time, when
religion and righteousness shall prosper
and flourish in the universe. And this is
not only probable from reason, but the
scriptures also assure us of it. All the
great things, that are spoken of the ad-
vancement

vancement and prosperity of Christ's SERM. XVII. kingdom, are to be understood in this view; namely, that things will constantly have a tendency to the establishing of true religion; and that in the end, as it is expressed by the prophet, *the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.*

From what has been said, we may make the following inferences. And

1. From hence we may see the reasonableness of the duty of prayer; for if God exercises a providence over mankind, and is concerned for every individual, then there is a necessity for our applying to him, in the various circumstances we may be under. And our prayers will not be in vain, as they are made to the Governor of the universe, who has a tender regard for our happiness. And as we may be assured, that in the conduct of his providence, he will have a regard to the interest of religion and virtue, so he will have a due respect to our sincere addresses to him, so far as is consistent with our own, and the general good.

2. From hence also, good men may receive great consolation, through all the various

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various vicissitudes and events of their life. For they may be well assured, that if God, who loves virtue and innocence, governs the world, he will have regard to their happiness. And if they cannot discern, in the course of his providence, his favour here in this small part of their existence, yet they may rest satisfied that there shall be a just balance of things, and that upon the whole they shall be rendered happy. In this life, God frequently orders such a connection of things, that good men are rendered happy in the practice of religion and virtue; but if it is sometimes otherwise, and they are afflicted for wise reasons, which possibly, we cannot comprehend, they will, no doubt, have a full compensation in their future being, from the just Governor of the world.

3. From hence also, vicious and wicked men, may have always just ground of fear and terror; for it is certain, that they can have no right to the care and concern of providence; they can have no grounds to trust in it, or to hope in its favourable protection. Though for some time they are permitted to go on and prosper, they have no claim to the continuance

ance of its favour ; and they may justly
dread the judgment which will at length
take place. Some circumstances, and
some connection between them and good
men, may prevent at present, a just ven-
geance ; but this will not always be ; there
will be a time when the justice of hea-
ven shall be conspicuous. And how ter-
rible must it be for a reasonable mind, to
reflect, that it has no claim to the good-
ness of heaven, and that it has nothing
to expect from thence but wrath and pu-
nishment ? What pleasure and satisfaction
can a man have in life, when he seriously
considers that he is an Outlaw of heaven,
and as it were, a rebel against the Sove-
reign of the universe, whose wise provi-
dence can defeat at once all his schemes
of happiness, and bring him to everlast-
ing destruction.

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state of his favour; and they may judge
 that the judgment which will be
 made. Some circumstances, and
 some connection between them and good
 men, may prevent at present, a just con-
 sideration; but this will not always be; there
 will be a time when the justice of hea-
 ven shall be conspicuous. And how can
 it be that it be for a reasonable mind to
 reflect, that it has no claim to the good-
 ness of heaven, and that it has nothing
 to expect from thence but wrath and pun-
 ishment? What pleasure and satisfaction
 can a man have in life, when he constantly
 considers that he is an outlaw of heaven,
 and as it were, a rebel against the Sovereign
 of the universe, whose will he pro-
 vokes, and who can defeat at once all his schemes
 of happiness, and bring him to everlast-
 ing destruction.

